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MARY RUSSELL MITFORD

AND HER SURROUNDINGS

BY

CONSTANCE HILL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLEN G. HILL AND REPRODUCTIONS OF PORTRAITS

"There are few names which fall with a pleasanter sound upon the ears of those who adopt authors as friends than the name of Mary Russell Mitford."

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMXX

The centre design in the binding represents a French gold enamelled watch which belonged to Mrs. Mitford and was inherited by her daughter. The original is in the possession of the Misses Lovejoy.

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WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD., PRINTERS, PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND

PREFACE

THE more we study the life and character of Mary Russell Mitford the more we become attached to her, for we come under the influence of a nature that seems to radiate peace and good-will upon all who surround her.

"The pleasant compelled enjoyment of her tales," writes Harriet Martineau, "is ascribable no doubt to the flow of good spirits and kindliness that lighted up and warmed everything that her mind produced." And if we seek for a further reason, surely it is to be found, as another writer observes, "in their strong rural flavour. They breathe the air of the hay-fields and the scent of the hawthorn boughs. There is nothing artificial about them, nothing of the conventional pastoral. They are native and to the manner born."

Here is an example that occurs in a letter to a friend, written long before her printed works appeared. Speaking of a walk in the Berkshire meadows on a spring morning, she says: "Oh,

how beautiful they were to-day, with all their train of callow goslings, and frisking lambs, and laughing children chasing the butterflies that floated like animated flowers in the air! . . . How full of fragrance and of melody! It is when walking in such scenes, listening to the mingled notes of a thousand birds and inhaling the mingled perfume of a thousand flowers that I feel the real joy of existence."

Many writers have imitated Miss Mitford's style since the "tales" of *Our Village* first took the reading world by surprise nearly a hundred years ago; but none of those writers, in my opinion, possess her potent charm, nor do they possess her wonderful power of making her readers see nature, as it were, through her eyes and grasp the beauty and poetry of rural life.

Mary as a child was shy and silent before strangers, but withal very observant. Writing of the impressions made upon her mind by some of the French *émigré* coteries with which she had come in contact, she says: "In truth they formed a motley group [whose] contrasts and combinations were too ludicrous not to strike irresistibly the fancy of an acute observing girl whose perception of the ludicrous was rendered

keener by the invincible shyness which confined the enjoyment entirely to her own breast."

But is it not to the experiences gained by such quiet, shy children as herself and Charlotte Brontë that we owe much of our knowledge of life and its surroundings? It is the listeners not the talkers that can hand down this knowledge to us.

Miss Mitford's talents were varied, and we owe to her pen some stirring dramas which were performed with much éclat on the London stage, and in which John Kemble and Macready took the leading parts. The public were astonished to learn that it was a gentle lady living in a remote Berkshire village who was thus moving the great London audiences.

A shrewd American critic of the day remarks: "In all these plays there is strong, vigorous writing—masculine in the free unhashed use of language—but wholly womanly in its purity from coarseness or licence and in the intermixture of those incidental touches of softest feeling and finest observation which are peculiar to the gentler sex."

It has been said of Miss Mitford by one who knew her that "as a letter-writer she has

rarely been surpassed, and that her correspondence, so full as it is of point in allusions, so full of anecdote and of recollections, will be considered among her finest writings." Even her hasty notes, we are told, "had a relish about them quite their own." It is interesting to find the views she herself entertained on the subject of letter-writing as given in her *Recollections of a Literary Life*. It runs as follows: "Such is the reality and identity belonging to letters written at the moment and intended only for the eye of a favourite friend, that probably any genuine series of epistles were the writer ever so little distinguished would . . . possess the invaluable quality of individuality which so often causes us to linger before an old portrait of which we know no more than that it is a Burgomaster by Rembrandt or a Venetian Senator by Titian. The least skilful pen when flowing from the fulness of the heart . . . shall often paint with as faithful and life-like a touch as either of those great masters."

Mary Russell Mitford's friends were numerous, both here in England and on the other side of the Atlantic, and her sympathies were as wide as the great ocean that lies between us. She writes in later life: "I love poetry and people

as well at sixty as I did at sixteen, and can never be sufficiently grateful to God for having permitted me to retain the two joy-giving faculties of admiration and sympathy by which we are enabled to escape from the consciousness of our own infirmities into the great works of all ages and the joys and sorrows of our immediate friends."

This sunny nature which was unembittered by severe trials speaks to us in all the stories of *Our Village*, and it spread such a halo about the scenes therein described that little Three Mile Cross—the prototype of *Our Village*—became in time a resort of pilgrims from far and near, among whom were some of the finest spirits of the age. All longed to gaze upon the cottage in which Mary Russell Mitford had dwelt, and to sit in the small parlour whose window looks down upon the village street, where she had written the stories so dear to her readers.

Happily the cottage itself, with the little general shop on one side and the village inn on the other, are still so much what they were in her day that the long space of time that has rolled by since her room was left vacant seems to vanish, and as we enter the front door we

almost expect to see the small figure of the "lady of *Our Village*" coming down the narrow stairs to welcome us.

* * * * *

Before closing this Preface I would express my gratitude to Lord Treowen, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Palmer, Mr. F. Cowslade, Mr. W. May, the Misses Lovejoy, and Mr. J. J. Cooper, for permission to reproduce valuable portraits and relics, and for other kind help.

CONSTANCE HILL.

GROVE COTTAGE,
FROGNAL, HAMPSTEAD,
August, 1919.

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MARY RUSSELL MITFORD

CHAPTER I

AN AUTHOR'S BIRTHPLACE

In a sunny corner of Hampshire there lies the tiny historic town of Alresford on the gentle slopes of a hill, at whose feet flows the little river Arle which gives its name to the place. "A town so small that but for an ancient market very slenderly attended, nobody would have dreamt of calling it anything but a village." And yet, oddly enough, in this same place great dignity was united with rustic simplicity, for the living of "Old" Alresford was one of the richest in England, and was held by the Bishop of Exeter in conjunction with his very poor see. The Post Office was formerly installed in a very small room with nothing but a letter-box in the window; still, it had its importance, being at the head of many others scattered over the country-side.

Alresford was the birthplace of one who loved nature as few have loved her, and whose writings "breathe the air of the hay-fields and the scent of the hawthorn boughs," and seem to

waft to us "the sweet breezes that blow over ripened cornfields or daisied meadows."

The name of Mary Russell Mitford—the author of *Our Village*—is dear to thousands of readers, both English and American, for she has enabled them to see nature with her eyes and to enter into the very spirit of rural life.

Alresford is built on the plan of the letter T, at the top of which stands the old church; Broad Street being the perpendicular stem, traversed by East Street and West Street, which form the cross-bar.

Supposing that we are coming up from the valley below where we have left behind us the winding river with its old mill, we enter the lower end of Broad Street—that picturesque street with its raised footpaths on either side bordered by trees, and its low, irregular houses, dominated at the upper end by the grey tower of the old church. That dignified looking house on the right-hand side, with its hooded doorway and its tall windows, belonged to Dr. Mitford.

Here it was that the doctor started a practice soon after his marriage with Miss Russell, the only child and heiress of the late Dr. Russell, Rector of Ashe, and here, on the 16th December, 1787, Mary, also an only child, was born.

THE HOUSE IN BROAD STREET

"A pleasant house in truth it was," she writes. "The breakfast-room . . . was a lofty and spacious apartment literally lined with books, which, with its Turkey carpet, its glowing fire, its sofas and its easy-chairs, seemed, what indeed it was, a very nest of English comfort. The windows opened on a large old-fashioned garden, full of old-fashioned flowers —stocks, roses, honeysuckles and pinks; and that again led into a grassy orchard, abounding with fruit trees. . . .

"What a playground was that orchard! and what playfellows were mine! My maid Nancy with her trim prettiness, my own dear father, handsomest and cheerfullest of men, and the great Newfoundland dog Coe, who used to lie down at my feet as if to invite me to mount him, and then to prance off with his burthen, as if he enjoyed the fun as much as we did! . . . How well I remember my father's carrying me round the orchard on his shoulder, holding fast my little three-year-old feet, whilst the little hands hung on to his pig-tail, which I called my bridle; hung so fast, and tugged so heartily, that sometimes the ribbon would come off between my fingers and send his hair floating and the powder flying down his back! . . . Happy, happy days! It is good to have the memory of such a childhood!"

Miss Mitford writes on another occasion :—

"In common with many only children, I learnt to read at a very early age. My father would perch me on the breakfast-table to exhibit my only accomplishment to some admiring guest, who admired all the more [from my being] a small puny child, gifted with an affluence of curls [who] might have passed for the twin sister of my own great doll. On the table was I perched to read some Foxite newspaper, *Courier* or *Morning Chronicle*, the Whiggish oracles of the day. . . . I read leading articles to please the company; and my dear mother recited 'The Children in the Wood' to please me. This was my reward, and I looked for my favourite ballad after every performance, just as the piping bull-finch that hung in the window looked for his lump of sugar after going through 'God save the King.' The two cases were exactly parallel."

We have sat in the very room where this scene took place. Little is changed there, and we stepped from its windows "opening down to the ground" into the garden. A narrow foot-path, bordered by greensward, led to a small flagged courtyard, flanked on one side by a quaint old brew-house, with its red-tiled roof and peaked windowed centre. Then, passing through a wicket-gate, we found ourselves in

the "large old-fashioned garden," itself gay with flowers as of yore.

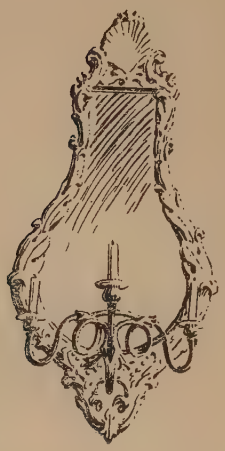
An adjoining house has arisen, since the Mitfords lived in their house more than a hundred years ago, but this building has in its turn grown old, so that it does not mar the character of the place.

Beyond the garden lay the orchard, now used as a tennis lawn, but still happily surrounded by trees, through whose boughs peeps of the sweet surrounding country can be seen. Indeed Alresford is entirely encircled by the country, and its three only streets—Broad Street, East Street, and West Street—lead straight into it. Miss Mitford, describing the views on either side of their grounds, says that to the south rose the "picturesque church with its yews and lindens, and beyond it a down as smooth as velvet, dotted with rich islands of coppice, hazel, woodbine and hawthorn"; while down in the valley "gleamed a bright, clear lakelet radiant with swans and water-lilies, which the simple townsfolk were content to call the 'Great Pond.'"

Dr. Mitford's house must indeed have been a "pleasant home" for a child, with its garden and orchard for a playground behind the house, and, in front, its cheerful view of the village street with its ever-changing scenes of passing

horsemen and carts, or of herds of sheep and cattle driven to market.

Here Mary first learnt, though unconsciously, to enjoy the beauties of nature and to enter into the simple pleasures of village life.



CHAPTER II

HAPPY MEMORIES

THE market of old days used to be held in an open space where East Street and West Street meet, near to the Bell Inn, whose gilded sign, in the form of a bas-relief, is displayed over its entrance.

Here we can fancy the little Mary being taken to see the gay booths with their display of toys or of ginger-bread, and the sheep or pigs in pens.

Miss Mitford was warmly attached to the place of her birth, and often alludes to it, but usually under the pseudonym of "Cranley."

"One of the noisiest inhabitants," she writes, "of the small, irregular town of Cranley, in which I had the honour to be born, was a certain cobbler by name Jacob Giles. He lived exactly over-right our house in a little appendage to the baker's shop. . . . At his half-hatch might he be seen stitching and stitching, with the peculiar, regular two-handed jerk proper to the art of cobbling, from six in the morning to six at

night. . . . There he sat with a dirty red night-cap over his grizzled hair, a dingy waistcoat and old blue coat, darned, patched and ragged, and a greasy leathern apron. . . .

"The face belonging to this costume was rough and weather-beaten, deeply lined and deeply tinted of a right copper colour, with a nose that would have done honour to Bardolph, and a certain indescribable half-tipsy look, even when sober. Nevertheless the face, ugly and tipsy as it was, had its merits. . . . There was good humour in the half-shut eye, the pursed-up mouth and the whole jolly visage. . . . There he sat in that small den, looking something like a thrush in a goldfinch's cage, and singing with as much power and far wider range —albeit his notes were hardly as melodious— Jobson's songs in the 'Devil to Pay' and 'A cobbler there was, and he lived in a stall, which served him for parlour, for kitchen and hall' being his favourites.

". . . Poor as he was Jacob Giles had always something for those poorer than himself; would share his scanty dinner with a starving beggar, and his last quid of tobacco with a crippled sailor. The children came to him for nuts and apples, for comical stories and droll songs; the very curs of the street knew that they had a friend in the poor cobbler.

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD'S
BIRTHPLACE

"For my own part I can recollect Jacob Giles as long as I can recollect anything. He made the shoes for my first doll (pink I remember they were)—a doll called Sophie, who had the misfortune to break her neck by a fall from the nursery window. Jacob Giles mended all the shoes of the family, with whom he was a universal favourite. . . . He used to mimic Punch for my amusement, and I once greatly offended the real Punch by preferring the cobbler's performance of the closing scene."

Writing in after years, Miss Mitford remarks: "Where my passion for plays began it is difficult to say. Perhaps at the little town of Alresford, when I was somewhat short of four years old, and was taken by my dear father to see one of the greatest tragedies of the world set forth in a barn. Even now I have a dim recollection of a glimmering row of candles dividing the end which was called the stage from the part which did duty as pit and boxes, of the black face and the spangled turban, of my wondering admiration, and the breathless interest of the rustic audience."

Among some of her happiest recollections of early childhood were her rides on horseback with her father. "This dear papa of mine," she writes, "whose gay and careless temper all the professional etiquette of the world could

never tame into the staid gravity proper to a doctor of medicine, happened to be a capital horseman, and abandoning the close carriage almost wholly to my mother used to pay his country visits on a favourite blood mare, whose extreme docility and gentleness tempted him into having a pad constructed, perched upon which I might occasionally accompany him, when the weather was favourable and the distance not too great.

"A groom, who had been bred up in my grandfather's family, always attended us, and I do think that both Brown Bess and George liked to have me with them almost as well as my father did. The old servant, proud, as grooms always are, of a fleet and beautiful horse, was almost as proud of my horsemanship, for I, cowardly enough, Heaven knows, in after years, was then too young and too ignorant for fear—if it could have been possible to have any sense of danger when strapped so tightly to my father's saddle, and enclosed so fondly by his strong and loving arm. Very delightful were those rides across the breezy Hampshire downs on a sunny summer morning!"

CHAPTER III

VILLAGE NEIGHBOURS

In one of Miss Mitford's tales entitled *A Country Barber* she describes a humble neighbour whose tiny shop adjoined their own "handsome and commodious dwelling." This tiny shop has long since disappeared, having given place to the "adjoining house" already mentioned.

"The barber's shop," we are told, "consisted of a low-browed cottage with a pole before it, and a half-hatch always open, through which was visible a little dusty hole where a few wigs, on battered wooden blocks, were ranged round a comfortable shaving chair. There was a legend over the door in which 'William Skinner, wig-maker, hairdresser, and barber' was set forth in yellow letters on a blue ground."

After speaking of her happy early recollections of "Will Skinner," Miss Mitford remarks: "So agreeable indeed is the impression which he has left in my memory that I cannot help regretting the decline and extinction of a race

which, besides figuring so notably in the old novels and comedies, formed so genial a link between the higher orders of society, supplying to the rich the most familiar of followers and most harmless of gossips."

How vividly these words recall to our mind Sir Walter Scott's old Caxon the barber and familiar follower of Mr. Oldbuck, "who was accustomed to bring to his patron each morning along with the powder and pomatum his version of the politics or the gossip of the neighbourhood.

"'Heeh, sirs!' he exclaims, 'nae wonder the commons will be discontent, when they see magistrates, and bailies, and deacons, and the provost himsell wi' heads as bald and as bare as one o' my blocks!'

"It certainly was not Will Skinner's beauty," writes Mary Mitford, "that caught my fancy. His person was hardly of the kind to win a lady's favour, even although that lady were only four years of age. . . . Good old man! I see him in my mind's eye at this moment: lean, wrinkled, shabby, poor, slow of speech, and ungainly of aspect, yet pleasant to look at and delightful to recollect. It was the overflowing kindness of his temper that rendered Will Skinner so general a favourite. Poor he was certainly and lonely, for he had been crossed

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD
From a miniature

in love in his youth, and lived alone in his little tenement, with no other companions than his wig blocks and a tame starling. ' Pretty company ' he used to call them.

" His fortunes had at one time assumed a more flourishing aspect when the Bishop of Exeter and Rector of Alresford had employed him to superintend the ' posting ' of his wig, and had also promoted him to the posts of sexton and of deputy parish clerk. But on the death of the Bishop, and on the advent of the French Revolution, when cropped heads came into fashion and powder and hairdressing went out, poor Will found himself nearly at his wit's end. In this dilemma he resolved to turn his hand to other employments, and, living in the neighbourhood of a famous trout stream, he applied himself to the construction of artificial flies.

" This occupation he usually followed in his territory the churchyard, a place . . . occupying a gentle eminence by the side of Cranley Down—a down on which the cricketers of that cricketing country used to muster two elevens for practice, almost every fine evening, from Easter to Michaelmas. Thither Will, who had been a cricketer himself in his youth, and still loved the wind of a ball, used to resort on summer afternoons, perching himself on a large

square raised monument, a spreading lime tree above his head, Izaak Walton before him, and his implements of trade at his side. There he sat, now manufacturing a cannon-fly, and now watching Tom Taylor's unparagoned bowling.

" On this spot our intimacy commenced. A spoilt child and an only child, it was my delight to escape from nurse and nursery and to follow everywhere the dear papa, [even] to the cricket ground, in spite of all remonstrance, causing him no small perplexity as to how to bestow me in safety during the game. Will and the monument seemed to offer exactly the desired refuge, and our good neighbour readily consented to fill the post of deputy nursery-maid for the time, assisted in his superintendence by our very beautiful and sagacious black Newfoundland dog called Coe. . . .

" Poor dear old man, what a life I led him ! —now playing at bo-peep on one side of the great monument and now on the other ; now crawling away amongst the green graves ; now gliding round before him, and laughing up in his face as he sat. . . . How he would catch me away from the very shadow of danger if a ball came near ; and how often did he interrupt his own labours to forward my amusement, sliding from his perch to gather lime branches to stick in Coe's collar, or to collect daisies,

buttercups, or ragged-robins to make what I used to call daisy-beds for my doll."

Here is another pretty incident of the Alresford life recorded by Miss Mitford.

" Before we left Hampshire," she writes, " my maid Nancy married a young farmer, and nothing would serve her but I must be bridesmaid. And so it was settled.

" I remember the whole scene as if it were yesterday ! How my father took me himself to the churchyard gate, where the procession was formed, and how I walked next to the young couple hand-in-hand with the bridegroom's man, no other than the village blacksmith, a giant of six feet three, who might have served as a model for Hercules. Much trouble had he to stoop low enough to reach down to my hand, and many were the rustic jokes passed upon the disproportioned pair. . . .

" In this order, followed by the parents on both sides, and a due number of uncles, aunts and cousins, we entered the church, where I held the glove with all the gravity and importance proper to my office ; and so contagious is emotion that when the bride cried, I could not help crying for company. But it was a love-match, and between smiles and blushes Nancy's tears soon disappeared, and so did mine. The happy husband helped his pretty wife into her

own chaise-cart, my friend the blacksmith lifted me in after her, and we drove gaily to the large, comfortable farm-house where her future life was to be spent.

"The bride was [soon] taken to survey her new dominions by her proud bridegroom, and the blacksmith, finding me, I suppose, easier to carry than to lead, followed close upon their steps with me in his arms.

"Nothing could exceed the good nature of my country beau; he pointed out bantams and pea-fowls, and took me to see a tame lamb and a tall, staggering calf, born that morning; but for all that I do not think I should have submitted to the indignity of being carried if it had not been for the chastening influence of a little touch of fear. Entering the poultry yard I had caught sight of a certain turkey-cock, who erected that circular tail of his, and swelled out his deep red comb and gills after a fashion familiar to that truculent bird, but which up to the present hour I am far from admiring. . . .

"[At last] we drew back to the hall, a large square bricked apartment, with a beam across the ceiling and a wide yawning chimney, where many young people being assembled, and one of them producing a fiddle, it was agreed to have a country dance until dinner should be ready, the bride and bridegroom leading off, and I following with the bridegroom's man.

" Oh ! the blunders, the confusion, the merriment of that country dance ! No two people attempted the same figure ; few aimed at any figure at all ; each went his own way ; many stumbled, some fell, and everybody capered, laughed and shouted at once ! "

CHAPTER IV

EARLY LIFE IN READING

Towards the end of the year 1791, before the little Mary had become quite four years old, a change came over the fortunes of the family.

Dr. Mitford, in spite of some really good qualities, was of a careless and thoughtless disposition as regards money matters, and was, unhappily, addicted to games of chance. "He had the misfortune," writes his daughter, "to be the best whist player in England," and like the celebrated Mr. Micawber and so many of his class, he had an unchanging faith in his own "good luck," and felt confident that however dark the horizon might be something would turn up to his advantage. "Dr. Mitford," remarks a shrewd writer, "belonged to that class of impecunious individuals who seem to have been born insolvent."

He had come into possession of a large fortune on his marriage, for his bride-elect had refused to have any settlement made concerning

property under her own control, and this fortune had already nearly melted away.

In spite, however, of all his thoughtless extravagance, from which both wife and child suffered severely, they remained at all times devoted to him. As she grew older Mary could not shut her eyes to her father's faults; but she loved him in spite of them, dwelling constantly in her writings upon his invariable kindness to her as a child, which claimed, she considered, her lasting gratitude. "He possessed indeed," she remarks, "every manly and generous quality, excepting that which is so necessary in this workaday world—the homely quality called prudence."

On leaving Alresford, where many of their valued possessions had to be sold, the little family removed to a house in Southampton Street, Reading, where the doctor hoped to establish a practice. This street, which crosses the river Kennet by a stone bridge, has still an old-world appearance, with its modest-looking dwelling-houses and its old-fashioned inns; while high above its roofs rises the spire of the old church of St. Giles.

It is in connection with this very church that we have a pleasant glimpse of the little Mary from the pen of Mrs. Sherwood, then a young girl living in Reading. "I remember," she

writes, "once going to a church in the town, which we did not usually attend, and being

SOUTHAMPTON STREET

taken into Mrs. Mitford's pew, where I saw the young authoress, Miss Mitford, then about four

years old. Miss Mitford was standing on the seat, and so full of play that she set me on to laugh in a way which made me thoroughly ashamed."

Writing of this same period in after life, Mary Mitford says: "It is now about forty years since I, a damsel scarcely so high as the table on which I am writing, and somewhere about four years old, first became an inhabitant of Belford Regis" (her name for Reading), "and really I remember a great deal not worth remembering concerning the place, especially our own garden and a certain dell on the Bristol road to which I used to resort for primroses."

It was during this first residence in Reading, when she was still a small child, that she saw London for the first time.

"Business called my father thither in the middle of July," she writes, "and he suddenly announced his intention of driving me up in his gig (a high open carriage holding two persons), unencumbered by any other companion, male or female. George only, the old groom, was sent forward with a spare horse over-night to Maidenhead Bridge, and, the dear papa conforming to my nursery hours, we dined at Crauford Bridge . . . and reached Hatchett's Hotel, Piccadilly (the New White Horse Cellar of the old stage-coaches), early in the afternoon. . . .

"I had enjoyed the drive past all expression,

chattering all the way, and falling into no other mistakes than those common to larger people than myself of thinking that London began at Brentford, and wondering in Piccadilly when the crowd would go by; and I was so little tired when we arrived that, to lose no time, we betook ourselves that night to the Haymarket Theatre, the only one then open. I had been at plays in the country, in a barn in Hampshire . . . but the country play was nothing to the London play—a lively comedy with the rich caste of those days—one of the comedies that George III enjoyed so heartily. I enjoyed it as much as he, and laughed and clapped my hands and danced on my father's knee, and almost screamed with delight, so that a party in the same box, who had begun by being half angry at my restlessness, finished by being amused with my amusement.

"The next day, my father, having an appointment at the Bank, took the opportunity of showing me St. Paul's and the Tower.

"At St. Paul's I saw all the wonders of the place, whispered in the whispering gallery, and walked up the tottering wooden stairs, not into the ball itself but to the circular balustrade of the highest gallery beneath it. I have never been there since, but I can still recall most vividly that wonderful panorama: the strange

diminution produced by the distance, the toy-like carriages and horses, and men and women moving noiselessly through the toy-like streets. . . . Looking back to that [scene] what strikes me most is the small dimensions to which the capital of England was then confined. When I stood on the topmost gallery of St. Paul's I saw a compact city spreading along the river, it is true, from Billingsgate to Westminster, but clearly defined to the north and to the south, the West-End beginning at Hyde Park on the one side and the Green Park on the other. Then Belgravia was a series of pastures and Paddington a village.

"We proceeded to the Tower, that place so striking by force of contrast . . . the jewels and the armoury glittering . . . amidst the gloom of the old fortress and the stories of great personages imprisoned, beheaded, buried within its walls;—a dreary thing it seemed to be a queen! But at night I went to Astley's, and I forgot the sorrows of Lady Jane Grey and Anne Boleyn in the wonders of the horsemanship and the tricks of the clown."

Into the last day were crowded visits to the Houses of Lords and Commons, to Westminster Abbey, to Cox's Museum in Spring Gardens, to the Leverian Museum in the Blackfriars Road, and finally at night to the theatre once more,

returning home on the morrow "without a moment's weariness of mind or body."

About this time Lord Charles Murray-Aynsley, a younger son of the Duke of Athol, became engaged to be married to a cousin of the Mitfords.

"Lord Charles, as fine a young man as one should see in a summer's day, tall, well-made, with handsome features . . . and charming temper, had an infirmity which went nigh to render all [his] good gifts of no avail; a shyness, a bashfulness, a timidity most painful to himself and distressing to all about him. . . . That a man with such a temperament, who could hardly summon courage to say 'How d'ye do?' should ever have wrought himself up to the point of putting the great question was wonderful. . . . I myself, a child not five years old, one day threw him into an agony of blushing by running up to his chair in mistake for my papa. Now I was a shy child, a very shy child, and as soon as I arrived in front of his lordship and found that I had been misled by a resemblance of dress, by the blue coat and buff waistcoat, I first of all crept under the table, and then flew to hide my face in my mother's lap; my poor fellow-sufferer, too big for one place of refuge, too old for the other, had nothing for it but to run away, which, the door being luckily open, he happily accomplished."

CHAPTER V

LYME REGIS

Dr. Mitford had been gradually establishing a practice in Reading, where a remarkable cure he had effected was already making his name known, when, as his daughter tells us, he resolved to remove to Lyme, "feeling with characteristic sanguineness that in a fresh place success would be certain."

Some of our readers will no doubt have visited Lyme Regis—that quaint little seaport situated on the steep slope of a hill, whose main street seems, as Jane Austen has remarked, "to be almost hurrying into the water." They will remember its harbour formed by the curved stone piers of the old Cobb, from which can be seen the pretty bay with its sandy beach bordered by the Parade, or "Walk" as it used to be called, which runs at the foot of a grassy hillside. At the town end of this "Walk" are to be seen some thatched cottages nestling under the shelter of the hill, and beyond them on a small promontory, jutting out into the sea,

the old Assembly Rooms. A few miles eastward lies the sunny little bay of Charmouth, with a grand chain of hills beyond it, rising from the water's edge and terminating in the far distance in the Bill of Portland.

Lyme Regis lies in the borderland of Dorset and Devonshire, "but the character of the scenery," writes Miss Mitford, "the boldness of the coast, and the rich woodiness of the inland views belong entirely to Devonshire—beautiful Devonshire.

"Our habitation," she continues, "although situated not merely in the town but in the principal street, had nothing in common with the small and undistinguished houses on either side. It was a very large, long-fronted stone mansion, terminated at either end by massive iron gates, the pillars of which were surmounted by spread eagles. An old stone porch, with benches on either side, projected from the centre, covered, as was the whole front of the house, with tall, spreading, wide-leafed myrtle, abounding in blossom, with moss-roses, jessamine and passion-flowers."

This old porch had its special historical association, for here William Pitt as a child used to play at marbles when his father the great Lord Chatham rented the Great House. Unhappily the porch has been altered and injured

THE "WALK" BY THE SEA

since we visited Lyme some years ago. Other changes have also been made at various periods, notably a storey added in the northern or upper end of the building; but in spite of these changes the Great House, as it is always called, still dominates the little town like a feudal castle of old amongst its vassals, its massive walls manfully resisting modern innovations.

The illustration represents the house as it appeared in Miss Mitford's day.

The southern portion of the building is of the most ancient date. Its walls are of great thickness. The Great House is full of traditions of past history, and its gloomy vaults and passages below ground must have witnessed many a tragic scene at the time of the Monmouth Rebellion. Here it was that Judge Jeffreys took up his quarters for a time when he came to stamp out the Rebellion and to wreak the vengeance of James II upon the unhappy followers of his rival. The owner of the house in those days was a man named Jones—the squire of Lyme—who aided and abetted Jeffreys in all his awful tyranny, spying upon the inhabitants and reporting every idle word that might serve to incriminate them. The memory of Jones is loathed to this day, and tradition declares the house to be haunted by his ghost.

Happily the little girl, who came to live in this weird old mansion, knew nothing of its tragic history, and could laugh and play with childish mirth above its sombre vaults. In her *Recollections*, Mary Mitford speaks of the "large, lofty rooms of the building, of its noble oaken staircases, its marble hall, and its long galleries," and mentions "the book room," where her grandfather Dr. Russell's fine library was arranged. "Behind the building," she says, "which extended round a paved quadrangle, was the drawing-room, a splendid apartment looking upon a little lawn surrounded by choice evergreens," beyond which lay the spacious gardens.

The drawing-room still bears traces of its former dignity in its lofty ceiling and handsome dentil cornice, and also in its three tall recessed windows, whose side panels end in fine curled scrolls.

"My own nurseries," she says, "were spacious and airy, but the place which I most affected was a dark panelled chamber on the first floor, to which I descended through a private door by half a dozen stairs, so steep that, still a very small and puny child between eight and a half and nine and a half, and unable to run down them in the common way, I used to jump from one step to the other."

THE GREAT HOUSE

We have entered this small panelled room, which is lighted by a narrow leaded window, and as we looked upon the steps leading down from the upper room we fancied we saw the tiny figure jumping from step to step.

"This chamber," continues Miss Mitford, "was filled with such fossils as were then known . . . some the cherished products of my own discoveries, and some broken for me by my father's little hammer from portions of the rocks that lay beneath the cliffs, under which almost every day we used to wander hand-in-hand."

Beyond "the little lawn, surrounded by choice evergreens," there was "an old-fashioned greenhouse and a filbert-tree walk, from which again three detached gardens sloped abruptly down to one of the clear, dancing rivulets of that western country." These three gardens are still to be seen. A part of them is well cultivated, and abounds in smooth lawns, majestic trees and flowers of all kinds; but that part which belongs to the older portion of the mansion, deserted for many years, is left wild and untended. It is, however, pathetically beautiful in its mixture of garden flowers and showy weeds. The high box-edgings to the borders prove that great care was once taken of the place, and the tall rose bushes which still

abound stretch out their long branches of pink and white blossoms as if to hide what is mean and unsightly.

" In the steep declivity of the central garden," writes Mary, " which I was permitted to call mine, was a grotto overarching a cool, sparkling spring, never overflowing its small sandy basin, which yet was always full." " Years many and long," she adds, " have passed since I sat beside that tiny fountain, and yet never have I forgotten the pleasure which I derived from watching its clear crystal wave."

" The slopes on either side of the grotto," she says, " were carpeted with strawberries and dotted with fruit trees. One drooping medlar, beneath whose pendent branches I have often hidden, I remember well."

This spring is known in that country-side by the name of the " Lepers' Well." It is reached by a steep flight of rugged stone steps from the terrace above, and is still surrounded by old gnarled fruit trees, though the medlar seems to have disappeared. Beyond a low hedge at the foot of the grounds flows the little river Lym, clear and sparkling as ever.

Lyme is full of traditions, and this little river, at one spot, bears the name of " Jordan," so called by a colony of Baptists who took refuge in the neighbourhood during the seventeenth

century. It was in "Jordan" that they immersed their converts, and the old Biblical names given by them to the adjoining fields of Jericho and Paradise still linger in that district.

"I used to disdain the [Devonshire] streamlets," writes Mary, "with such scorn as a small damsel fresh from the Thames and the Kennett thinks herself privileged to display. 'They call that a river here, papa! Can't you jump me over it?' quoth I in my sauciness. About a month ago I heard a young lady from New York talking in some such strain of Father Thames. 'It's a pretty little stream,' said she, 'but to call it a river!' And I half expected to hear a complete reproduction of my own impertinence, and a request to be jumped from one end to the other of Caversham Bridge!"

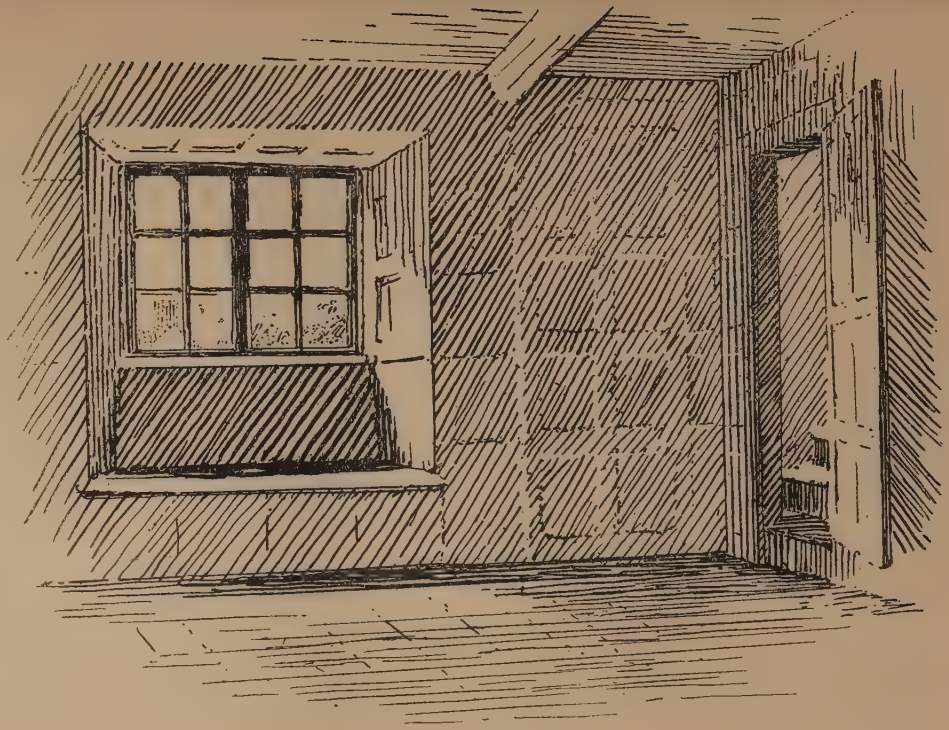
CHAPTER VI

A STORMY COAST

WRITING of her sojourn at Lyme Regis Miss Mitford says :—

"That was my only opportunity of making acquaintance with the mighty ocean in its winter sublimity of tempest and storm ; and partly perhaps from the striking and awful nature of the impression [upon the mind of] a lonely, musing, visionary child, the recollection remains indelibly fixed in my memory, fresh and vivid as if of yesterday. . . .

"Once my father took me from my bed at midnight that I might see, from the highest storey of our house, the grandeur and the glory of the tempest ; the spray rising to the very tops of the cliffs, pale and ghastly in the lightning, and hear the roar of the sea, the moaning of the wind, the roll of the thunder, and amongst them all the fearful sound of the minute guns, telling of death and danger on that iron-bound coast. Then in the morning I have seen the cold bright wintry sun shining gaily on the dancing sea,



THE PANELLED CHAMBER

still stirred by the last breath of the tempest, and on the floating spars and parted timbers of the wreck. . . .

"My walks," she writes, "were confined to rambles on the shore with my maid, or still more to my delight with my dear father, the recollection of whose fond indulgence is connected with every pleasure of my childhood. . . . Sometimes we would go towards Charmouth, with its sweeping bay, passing below church and churchyard, perched high above us, and already undermined by the tide. Another time we bent our steps to the Pinny cliffs [that stretch away] on the western side of the harbour; the beautiful Pinny cliffs, where an old landslip had deposited a farm-house, with its outbuildings, its garden and its orchard, tossed half-way down amongst the rocks, its look of home and of comfort contrasting so strangely with the dark rugged masses above, below and around.

"My father, a dabbler in science, with his hammer and basket was engaged in breaking off fragments of rock, to search for curious spars and fossil remains; I in picking up shells and sea-weed. . . . What enjoyment it was to feel the pleasant sea-breeze, and see the sun dancing on the waters, and wander as free as the sea-bird over my head beneath those beetling cliffs!

Now for a moment losing sight of the dear papa, and now rejoining him with some delicate shell, or brightly coloured sea-weed, or imperfect *coruna ammoris*, enquiring into the success of his graver labours, and comparing our discoveries and treasures.

" What pleasure too to rest at the well-known cottage, the general termination of our walk, where old Simon the curiosity-monger picked up a mongrel sort of livelihood by selling fossils and petrifactions to one class of visitors, and cakes and fruit and cream to another. His scientific bargains were not without suspicion of a little cheatery, as my companion used laughingly to tell him . . . but the fruit and curds were honest, as I can well avouch ; and the legends of petrified sea-monsters, with which they were seasoned, bones of the mammoth, and skeletons of the sea-serpent have always been amongst the pleasantest of my seaside recollections."

Perhaps these " legends " had a tinge of prophecy in them, as it was only fifteen years later that Mary Anning, then a child of eleven years old, discovered in the rocks of Lyme Regis the gigantic fossil bones of the ichthyosaurus—a creature whose very jaw it seems exceeded six feet in length, and whose existence had hitherto been unknown. She also dis-

covered later on the remains of the plesiosaurus.[1]

Miss Anning kept a curiosity shop in a tiny house which is still to be seen facing the upper gates of the Great House. The King of Saxony, who visited Lyme in 1844, thus describes the place :—

"We had alighted from the carriage," he writes, "and were proceeding along on foot when we fell in with a shop in which the most remarkable petrifactions and fossil remains—the head of an ichthyosaurus, beautiful ammonites, etc.—were exhibited in the window. We entered and found a little shop and adjoining chamber completely filled with fossil productions of the coast. . . . I was anxious [before leaving] to write down the address of the place, and the woman who kept the shop with a firm hand wrote her name 'Mary Anning' in my pocket-book, and added as she returned the book into my hands : 'I am well known throughout the whole of Europe.'"

It is said that the King of Saxony paid a second visit to the fossil shop, when he invited Miss Anning to accompany him in his travelling coach and four to the scene of the great landslip at Pinny. On reaching a small farm-house on

[1] The entire skeletons of these actual creatures are now to be seen in the Natural History Museum at South Kensington.

the hillside they quitted the coach to roam about the fallen rocks. On their return they found an old country woman seated in the stately vehicle. She explained, with some confusion, that she wanted to be able to boast hereafter that she had sat for once in her life in a royal coach! The kindly monarch assured her that he was in no way displeased, and he handed her out of the coach with courtly politeness.

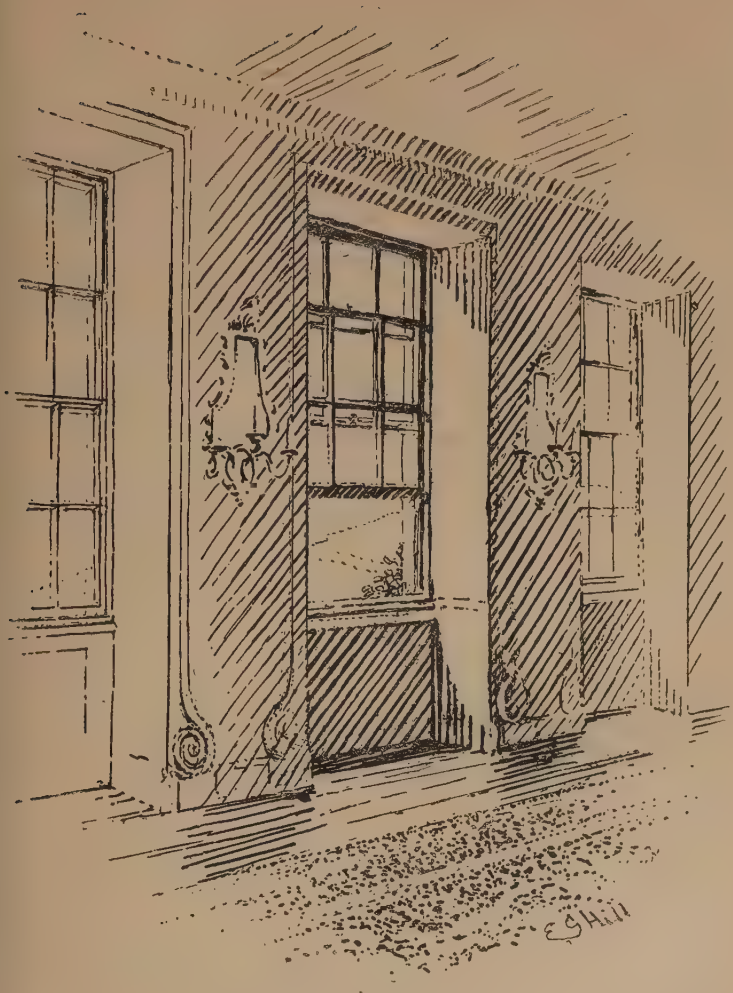
Miss Mitford in one of her letters remarks: "It is singular that the name of Mary Anning crosses me often. One of my friend Mr. Kenyon's graceful poems is addressed to her, and Charmouth and Lyme are dear to me as being full of my first recollections of the sea. I should like of all things to go there again and make acquaintance with Mary Anning."

Here are a few stanzas of the poem alluded to:—

"E'en poets shall by thee set store;
For wonders feed the poet's wish;
And is their mermaid wondrous more
Than thy half-lizard and half-fish?

. . . . .

While Lyme's dark-headed urchins grow
Each in his turn to grey-haired men,
Yet, when grown old, this beach they walk,
Some pensive breeze their grey locks fanning,
Their sons shall love to hear them talk
Of many a feat of Mary Anning."



IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

Writing of their residence in Lyme Mary says :—

" My dear mother had three or four young relations, misses in their teens, staying with her and was sufficiently occupied in playing the chaperone to the dull gaieties of the place. . . . Of course I was too young to be admitted to the society, such as it was ; but I had even then a dim glimmering perception of its being anything but exhilarating."

Sometimes the company assembled in the Great House. " One incident that occurred there," writes Miss Mitford—" a frightful danger —a providential escape—I shall never forget.

" There was to be a ball at the rooms, and a party of sixteen or eighteen persons, dressed for the assembly, were sitting in the dining-room at dessert. The ceiling was ornamented with a rich running pattern of flowers in high relief, the shape of the wreath corresponding pretty exactly with the company arranged round the oval table. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, all that part of the ceiling became detached and fell down in large masses upon the table and the floor. It seems even now all but miraculous how such a catastrophe could occur without danger to life or limb ; but the only things damaged were the flowers and feathers of the ladies and the fruits and wines of the

dessert. I myself, caught instantly in my father's arms, by whose side I was standing, had scarcely even time to be frightened, although after the danger was over our fair visitors of course began to scream."

Towards the end of their year's residence in Lyme Regis the fortunes of the Mitford family were once more clouded over.

"Nobody told me," writes Mary, "but I felt, I knew, I had an interior conviction for which I could not have accounted . . . that in spite of the company, in spite of the gaiety, something was wrong. It was such a foreshowing as makes the quicksilver in the barometer sink whilst the weather is still bright and clear.

"And at last the change came. My father went again to London and lost—I think, I have always thought so—more money. . . . Then one by one our visitors departed; and my father, who had returned in haste again, in equal haste left home, after short interviews with landlords, and lawyers, and auctioneers; and I knew—I can't tell how, but I did know—that everything was to be parted with and everybody paid.

"That same night two or three large chests were carried away through the garden by George and another old servant, and a day or two after my mother and myself, with Mrs.

Mosse, the good housekeeper who lived with my grandfather, and the other maid-servant, left Lyme in a hack-chaise."

After various delays, due partly to the breaking up of a camp between Bridport and Dorchester, the party pursued their journey in "a sort of tilted cart without springs." "Doubtless," remarks Mary, "many a fine lady would laugh at such a shift. But it was not as a temporary discomfort that it came upon my poor mother. It was her first touch of poverty. It seemed like the final parting from all the elegances and all the accommodations to which she had been used. I shall never forget her heart-broken look when she took her little girl upon her lap in that jolting caravan, nor how the tears stood in her eyes when we turned into our miserable bedroom when we reached the roadside alehouse where we were to pass the night. The next day we resumed our journey, and reached a dingy, comfortless lodging in one of the suburbs beyond Westminster Bridge."

CHAPTER VII

A FLIGHT

The "comfortless lodging" mentioned by Miss Mitford was on the Surrey side of Blackfriars Bridge, where Dr. Mitford, it seems, was able to find a refuge from his creditors within the rules of the King's Bench.

"What my father's plans were," writes his daughter in later years, "I do not exactly know; probably to gather together what disposable money still remained after paying all debts from the sale of books, plate and furniture at Lyme and thence to proceed . . . to practise in some distant town. At all events London was the best starting-place, and he could consult his old fellow-pupil and life-long friend, Dr. Babington, then one of the physicians to Guy's Hospital, and refresh his medical studies with experiments and lectures. In the meanwhile his spirits returned as buoyant as ever, and so, now that fear had changed into certainty, did mine."

But at this time, when the prospects of the family seemed to be irretrievably overclouded

E. Dayes

BLACKFRIARS BRIDGE
(1796)

and when dire poverty stared them in the face, an extraordinary event occurred to raise them suddenly into affluence !

" In the intervals of his professional pursuits," writes Mary, " my father walked about London with his little girl in his hand ; and one day (it was my birthday, and I was ten years old) he took me into a not very tempting-looking place which was, as I speedily found, a lottery office. An Irish lottery was upon the point of being drawn, and he desired me to choose one out of several bits of printed paper (I did not then know their significance) that lay upon the counter.

" ' Choose which number you like best,' said the dear papa, ' and that shall be your birthday present.'

" I immediately selected one, and put it into his hand : No. 2224.

" ' Ah,' said my father, examining it, ' you must choose again. I want to buy a whole ticket, and this is only a quarter. Choose again, my pet.'

" ' No, dear papa, I like this one best.'

" ' Here is the next number,' interposed the lottery office keeper, ' No. 2223.'

" ' Ay,' said my father, ' that will do just as well. Will it not, Mary ? We'll take that.'

" ' No,' returned I obstinately, ' that won't

do. This is my birthday you know, papa, and I am ten years old. Cast up *my* number and you'll find that makes ten. The other is only nine."

"My father, superstitious like all speculators, struck with my pertinacity and with the reason I gave, resisted the attempt of the office keeper to tempt me by different tickets, and we had nearly left the shop without a purchase when the clerk who had been examining different desks and drawers, said to his principal:

"'I think, sir, the matter may be managed if the gentleman does not mind paying a few shillings more. That ticket 2224 only came yesterday, and we have still all the shares: one-half, one-quarter, one-eighth, two-sixteenths. It will be just the same if the young lady is set upon it.'

"The young lady was set upon it, and the shares were purchased.

"The whole affair was a secret between us, and my father, whenever he got me to himself, talked over our future twenty thousand pounds —just like Alnaschar over his basket of eggs.

"Meanwhile time passed on, and one Sunday morning we were all preparing to go to church when a face that I had forgotten, but my father had not, made its appearance. It was the clerk of the lottery office. An express had just arrived from Dublin announcing that No. 2224 had been

drawn a prize of twenty thousand pounds, and he had hastened to communicate the good news."

"Ah, me!" writes Miss Mitford in later life. "In less than twenty years what was left of the produce of the ticket so strangely chosen? What? except a Wedgwood dinner-service that my father had had made to commemorate the event, with the Irish harp within the border on one side and his family crest on the other! That fragile and perishable ware outlasted the more perishable money."

The writer of a graceful article entitled, "In Miss Mitford's Country," which appeared in a magazine several years ago, saw at a friend's house in Reading some odd pieces of this very dinner-service. These consisted of "a tureen of beautiful shape, two or three soup-plates and a couple of butter-boats and stands in one, in Wedgwood fashion." When handling the china she observed "that the Mitford crest was stamped on one side of the pieces while on the opposite side appeared a harp bearing between the strings the mystic number 2224."

She supposed this to be the Wedgwoods' private number, and it was not until she came upon the passage just quoted in Miss Mitford's *Recollections of a Literary Life* that the mystery was solved.

CHAPTER VIII

RETURN TO READING

After the extraordinary event of the lottery ticket the Mitfords were suddenly placed in a position of opulence, and they joyfully quitted their dingy London lodgings and returned once more to Reading. The doctor had taken a new red brick house in the London Road, a road which in those days bordered the open country.

The house is still standing, and is probably much as it was in the Mitfords' day. It has a deep verandah in front, and behind stretches a long piece of garden. A small room at the back of the house is pointed out to visitors as Dr. Mitford's dispensary.

Mary Russell Mitford loved the old town of Reading—Belford Regis, as she always calls it in her stories—and the various descriptions of the place, scattered throughout her writings, make the Reading of her day to live again.

On one occasion she describes the view of the town as seen from the jutting corner of Friar Street, where she had taken shelter from a

shower of rain. She speaks of "the fine church tower of St. Nicholas,[1] with its picturesque piazza underneath" and its "old vicarage house hard by, embowered in evergreens"; of "the old irregular shops in the market-place, with the trees of the Forbury beyond just peeping between them, with all their varieties of light and shadow."

Another day, after mentioning "the huge monastic ruins of the Abbey," with all its monuments of ancient times, she goes on to say "or for a modern scene what can surpass the High Bridge on a sunshiny day? The bright river crowded with barges and small craft; the streets and wharfs and quays, all alive with the busy and stirring population of the country and the town—a combination of light and motion."

Miss Mitford has described this same scene as it appeared on a cold winter's evening in a book written late in life entitled, *Atherton and other Stories*, which we should like to quote here.

"From . . . the High Bridge the Kennet now showed like a mirror reflecting on its icy surface into a peculiar broad and bluish shine, the arch of lamps surmounting the graceful airy bridge and the twinkling lights that glanced here and there, from boat or barge or wharf, or from

[1] St. Lawrence.

some uncurtained window that overhung the river."

But the chief beauty of the old town was to be seen in summer time on a Saturday (market-day) at noon. "The old market-place, always picturesque from the irregular architecture of the houses, and the beautiful Gothic church by which it is terminated, is then all alive with the busy hum of traffic. . . . Noise of every sort is to be heard, from the heavy rumbling of so many loaded waggons over the paved market-place to the crash of crockery ware in the narrow passage of Princes Street. One of the noisiest and prettiest places is the Piazza at the end of St. Nicholas Church appropriated by long usage to the female vendors of fruit and vegetables." The butter market was at the back of the market proper, "where respectable farmers' wives and daughters sold eggs, butter and poultry." Here too "straw-hats, caps and ribbons were sold, also pet rabbits and guinea-pigs, together with owls and linnets in cages."

Among the odd characters who turned up on the occasion of markets or fairs Miss Mitford mentions a certain rat-catcher by name Sam Page "whose own appearance was as venomous as that of his retinue," and "told his calling almost as plainly as the sharp heads of the

DR. MITFORD'S HOUSE IN THE LONDON ROAD

ferrets which protruded from the pockets of his dirty jean jacket, or the bunch of dead rats with which he was wont to parade the streets of B. on a market-day." But before he had taken to this business, she says, he had tried many other callings, amongst them those of "a barrel-organ grinder, the manager of a celebrated company of dancing dogs, and the leader of a bear and a very accomplished monkey. Suddenly he reappeared one day at B. fair as showman of the Living Skeleton, and also a performer [himself] in the Tragedy of the Edinburgh Murders, as exhibited every half-hour at the price of a penny to each person." Sam confessed that he liked acting of all things, especially tragedy; "it was such fun."

Of the period with which we are dealing Mary writes: "I was a girl at the time—a very young girl, and, what is more to the purpose, a very shy one, so that I mixed in none of the gaieties of the place; but speaking from observation and recollection I can fairly say that I never saw any society more innocently cheerful." She tells us of "the old ladies and their tea visits, the gentlemen and their whist club, and the merry Christmas parties with their round games and their social suppers, their mirth and their jests."

And now for Mary herself: how did she strike

the new acquaintances that her parents were making? One who knew her well tells us that "she showed in her countenance, and in her mild self-possession, that she was no ordinary child; and with her sweet smile, her gentle temper, her animated conversation, her keen enjoyment of life, and her incomparable voice —"that excellent thing in woman"—there were few of the prettiest children of her age who won so much love and admiration from their friends young and old as little Mary Mitford."

In one of Miss Mitford's tales entitled *My Godmothers* there is an amusing account of a stiff maiden lady of the old school by name Mrs. Patience Wither (the "Mrs." being given her by brevet rank). "In point of fact," writes Mary, "she was not my godmother, having stood only as proxy for her younger sister, Mrs. Mary, my mother's intimate friend, then falling into a lingering decline.

"Mrs. Patience was very masculine in person, tall, square, large-boned and remarkably upright. Her features were sufficiently regular, and would not have been unpleasing but for the keen, angry look of her light blue eye . . . and her fiery, wiry red hair, to which age did no good,—it would not turn grey. . . . She lived in a large, tall, upright, stately house in the

largest street of a large town. It was a grave looking mansion, defended from the pavement by iron palisades, a flight of steps before the sober brown door, and every window curtained and blinded by chintz and silk and muslin, crossing and jostling each other. None of the rooms could be seen from the street, nor the street from any of the rooms—so complete was the obscurity.

"On the death of her sister Mrs. Patience . . . was pleased to lay claim to me in right of inheritance, and succeeded to the title of my godmother pretty much in the same way that she succeeded to the possession of Flora, her poor sister's favourite spaniel. I am afraid that Flora proved the more grateful subject of the two. I never saw Mrs. Patience but she took possession of me for the purpose of lecturing and documenting me on some subject or other, —holding up my head, shutting the door, working a sampler, making a shirt, learning the pence table, or taking physic. . . .

"She was assiduous in presents to me at home and at school; sent me cakes with cautions against over-eating, and needle-cases with admonitions to use them; she made over to me her own juvenile library, consisting of a large collection of unreadable books . . . nay, she even rummaged out for me a pair of old

battledores, curiously constructed of netted pack-thread—the toys of her youth! But bribery is generally thrown away upon children, especially on spoilt ones; the godmother whom I loved never gave me anything, and every fresh present from Mrs. Patience seemed to me a fresh grievance. I was obliged to make a call and a curtsy, and to stammer out something which passed for a speech, or, which was still worse, to write a letter of thanks—a stiff, formal, precise letter! I would rather have gone without cakes or needle-cases, books or battledores to my dying day. Such was my ingratitude from five to fifteen."

One of the most prominent figures in the Reading of those days was Dr. Valpy, headmaster of the Reading Grammar School. The school consisted of a group of buildings "standing," writes Miss Mitford, "in a nook of the pleasant green called the Forbury, and parted from the churchyard of St. Nicholas by a row of tall old houses. It was in itself a pretty object—at least I, who loved it almost as much as if I had been of the sex that learns Greek and Latin, thought so. . . . There was a little court before the door of the doctor's house with four fir trees, and at one end a projecting bay window belonging to a very long room [the doctor's study] lined with a noble collection of

books." The Forbury was used as the boys' playground.

Dr. Valpy was much reverenced by his fellow-townsmen and greatly loved by his pupils, in spite of the stern discipline of those days which he considered it his duty to administer to culprits. Among his pupils was Sergeant Talfourd, who thus describes his character: "Envy, hatred and malice were to him mere names—like the figures of speech in a schoolboy's theme, or the giants in a fairy-tale, phantoms which never touched him with a sense of reality. . . . His system of education was animated by a portion of his own spirit: it was framed to enkindle and to quicken the best affections."

Another contemporary who happened to be of a cynical turn of mind remarks of Dr. Valpy: "Had he been more supple in his principles or less open in their avowal he might have risen to the highest position in his sacred profession. A mitre might have been the reward of subserviency and the revenues of a diocese the bribe of tergiversation and hypocrisy, [but] he left to others such paths to preferment . . . and lived in the enjoyment of an unblemished reputation and a clear conscience."

On the further side of the Forbury stood a large old-fashioned building adjoining the Abbey Gateway and bearing the name of the Abbey

School. It was a school for " young ladies " of the ordinary type belonging to the eighteenth century, but which, at the time we are writing of, was gradually taking a higher position in general estimation. Three authoresses of very different degrees of fame were pupils in this establishment, namely : Jane Austen for a short time as a very young child, in about the year 1782, Miss Butt (afterwards Mrs. Sherwood) in 1790, and Mary Russell Mitford when the school was removed to London in 1798.

The school had formerly been carried on under the management of a Mrs. Latournelle, a good-natured person but, as Mrs. Sherwood tells us, " only fit for giving out clothes for the wash, mending them, making tea and ordering dinners." But after a time she took as a partner a young lady of talent and of excellent education who at once made her mark felt.

What, however, caused the permanent success of the school was the arrival in Reading of a certain Monsieur St. Quintin, the son of a nobleman in Alsace—a man of very superior intellect—who had been secretary to the Comte de Moustier, one of the last ambassadors from Louis XVI to the Court of St. James. Having lost all his property in the French Revolution, he was thankful to accept the post of French teacher in Dr. Valpy's school, and was soon

afterwards recommended by the doctor as a teacher of French in the Abbey School. In course of time he married Mrs. Latournelle's young partner, and they "soon so entirely raised the credit of the seminary," writes Mrs. Sherwood, "that when I went there, there were above sixty girls under their charge. The style of M. St. Quintin's teaching," she says, "was lively and interesting in the extreme."

Dr. Mitford had been a warm friend to M. St. Quintin ever since his arrival in Reading, and there was much pleasant intercourse between the Mitfords and the St. Quintins. In the summer of 1798 the school was transferred to London, and Dr. and Mrs. Mitford, who had then decided to send their little daughter to school, were glad to place her under the friendly care of M. and Madame St. Quintin.

CHAPTER IX

THE SCHOOL IN HANS PLACE

Monsieur and Madame St. Quintin, on removing the Abbey School from Reading to London, established it in Hans Place, a small oblong square of pleasant-looking houses with a garden in the centre. It was almost surrounded by fields, for London proper terminated in those days with the double toll-gates at Hyde Park Corner.

The school-house (No. 22) was one of the largest in the place, and possessed a spacious garden abounding in fine trees, smooth lawns and gay flower-beds. Thither the little Mary was sent on the reopening of the school after the midsummer holidays of the year 1798. Writing in later years she thus describes the event :—

"It is now more than twenty years since I, a petted child of ten years old, born and bred in the country, and as shy as a hare, was sent to that scene of bustle and confusion, a London school. Oh, what a change it was!

What a terrible change! . . . To leave my own dear home for this strange new place and these strange new people . . . and so many of them! . . . I shall never forget the misery of the first two days, blushing to be looked at, dreading to be spoken to, shrinking like a sensitive plant from the touch, ashamed to cry, and feeling as if I could never laugh again.

"These disconsolate feelings are not astonishing . . . the wonder is that they so soon passed away. But everybody was good and kind. In less than a week the poor wild bird was tamed. I could look without fear on the bright, happy faces; listen without starting to the clear, high voices, even though they talked in French; began to watch the ball and the battledore; and felt something like an inclination to join in the sports. In short, I soon became an efficient member of the commonwealth; made a friend, provided myself with a school-mother, a fine, tall, blooming girl . . . under whose protection I began to learn and unlearn, to acquire the habits and enter into the views of my companions, as well disposed to be idle as the best of them."

M. St. Quintin taught the pupils French, history and geography, also as much science as he was master of or as he thought it requisite

for a young lady to know. Madame St. Quintin did but little teaching at this period, but used to sit in the drawing-room with a book in her hand to receive visitors. After M. St. Quintin the mainstay of the school was the English teacher, Miss Rowden, an accomplished young lady of good birth, who was assisted by finishing masters for Italian, music, dancing and drawing. She was admired and loved by the whole school, and especially by Mary Mitford, over whom she exercised an excellent influence.

"To fill up any nook of time," writes Mary, "which the common demands of the school might leave vacant, we used to read together, chiefly poetry. With her I first became acquainted with Pope's Homer, Dryden's Virgil and the *Paradise Lost*. She read capitally, and was a most indulgent hearer of my remarks and exclamations;—suffered me to admire Satan and detest Ulysses, and rail at the pious Æneas as long as I chose."

The French teacher was a very different type of womanhood. "She was a tall, majestic woman," writes Mary, "between sixty and seventy, made taller by yellow slippers with long slender heels. . . . Her face was almost invisible, being concealed between a mannish kind of neck-cloth and an enormous cap, whose wide, flaunting strip hung over her cheeks and eyes;

—to say nothing of a huge pair of spectacles. Madame, all Parisian though she was, had the

HANS PLACE

fidgety neatness of a Dutch woman, and was scandalized at our untidy habits. Four days passed in distant murmurs . . . but this was

only the gathering of the wind before the storm. It was dancing day ; we were all dressed and assembled when Madame, provoked by some indications of latent disorder, instituted, much to our consternation, a general rummage through the house for all things out of their places. The collected mass was thrown together in one stupendous pile in the middle of the schoolroom —a pile that defies description or analysis. The whole was to be apportioned amongst the different owners and then affixed to their persons ! . . . Poor Madame ! Article after article was held up to be owned in vain : not a soul would claim such dangerous property. Nevertheless, she did succeed by dint of lucky guesses, [and soon] dictionaries were suspended from the necks of the pupils *en médaillon*, shawls tied round the waist *en ceinture*, and unbound music pinned to the frock *en queue* . . . not one of us but had three or four of these appendages ; many had five or six. These preparations were intended to meet the eye of Madame's countryman, the French dancing master, who would doubtless assist in supporting her authority. . . . She did not know that before his arrival we were to pass an hour in an exercise of another kind, under the command of a drill-sergeant. The man of scarlet was ushered in. It is impossible to say whether the professor of march-

ing or the poor Frenchwoman looked most disconcerted. Madame began a very voluble explanatory harangue ; but she was again unfortunate—the sergeant did not understand French. She attempted to translate : ' It is, Sare, que ces dames, dat dese miss be des traineuses.' This clear and intelligible sentence producing no other visible effect than a shake of the head, Madame desired the nearest culprit to tell ' ce soldat là ' what she had said, which caused him of the red coat to declare that ' it made his blood boil to see so many free-born English girls dominated over by their natural enemy.' Finally he insisted that we could not march with such incumbrances, which declaration being done into French all at once by half a dozen eager tongues, the trappings were removed and the experiment was ended."

In spite of this comical exception, the general system of education followed in Hans Place was greatly superior to that of the ordinary boarding schools of the day, where all that could be said of a young lady when her education was finished was that she " played a little, sang a little, talked a little indifferent French, painted shells and roses, not particularly like nature, danced admirably, and was the best player at battledore and shuttle-cock, hunt-the-slipper and blindman's-buff in her county."

Dr. and Mrs. Mitford visited their little daughter frequently during the period of her school life—often taking lodgings in the neighbourhood to be within easy reach. Mrs. Mitford writes on one of these occasions to her husband : "Mezza" (a pet name for Mary), "who has got her little desk here, and her great dictionary, is hard at her studies beside me. . . . Her little spirits are all abroad to obtain the prize, sometimes hoping, sometimes desponding. It is as well perhaps you are not here at present, as you would be in as great a fidget on the occasion as she herself is."

Whether Mary won this particular prize we do not know, but that she *did* win prizes is proved by the fact that two of them are carefully treasured by the descendants of some of her friends. One of these is in our temporary possession. It is a large volume entitled, *Adam's Geography*, bound in calf, and ornamented with elegant patterns in gilding. On the upper side of the binding are the words :—

Prix
de
Bonne Conduite
qu'a obtenu
Mlle. Midford

while on the reverse side we read :—

Mrs. St. Quintin's
School
Hans Place
June 17th
1801.

The Mitfords' name used to be spelt with a "d" at one time, but Dr. Mitford changed it to a "t" a few years later than the period of which we are writing.

There were three vacations in the year, the breaking up for which was always preceded by a festival. Before Easter and Christmas there was usually a ballet "when the sides of the schoolroom were fitted up with bowers, in which the little girls who had to dance were seated, and whence they issued at a signal from M. Duval the dancing master, attired as sylphs or shepherdesses, to skip or glide through the mazy movements of a fancy dance to the music of his kit. Or sometimes there would be a dramatic performance, as when the same room was converted into a theatre for the representation of Hannah More's *Search after Happiness*.

CHAPTER X

A GLIMPSE OF OLD FRENCH SOCIETY

DURING her school life Mary Mitford had an opportunity of seeing many of the French refugees of noble birth who had escaped from their country in the commencement of the Reign of Terror.

"M. St. Quintin," she tells us, "being a lively, kind-hearted man, with a liberal hand and a social temper, it was his delight to assemble as many as he could of his poor countrymen and countrywomen around his hospitable supper-table."

"Something wonderful and admirable it was," she writes, "to see how these dukes and duchesses, marshals and marquises, chevaliers and bishops bore up under their unparalleled reverses! How they laughed, and talked, and squabbled, and flirted, constant to their high heels, their rouge and their furbelows, to their old *liésons*, their polished sarcasms and their cherished rivalries! They clung even to their *mariages de convenance;* and the very habits

which would most have offended our English notions, if we had seen them in their splendid hotels of the Faubourg St. Germain, won tolerance and pardon when mixed up with such unaffected constancy and such cheerful resignation."

There were supper parties also given to other members of the French society by a cousin of Mary Mitford's who had married an *émigré* of high birth and who resided in Brunswick Square. Mary often spent the interval between Saturday afternoon and Monday morning with these relatives. "Saturday was their regular French day," she writes, "when in the evening the conversation, music, games, manners and cookery were studiously and decidedly French. Trictrac superseded chess or backgammon, reversi took the place of whist, Gretry of Mozart, Racine of Shakespeare; omelettes and salads, champagne moussu, and *eau sucré* excluded sandwiches, oysters and porter.

"At these suppers their little schoolgirl visitor," she says, "assisted, though at first rather in the French than the English sense of the word. I was present indeed, but had as little to do as possible either with speaking or eating. . . . However, in less than three months I became an efficient consumer of good things, and said 'oui, monsieur,' and 'merci, madame,'

as often as a little girl of twelve years old ought to say anything.

" I confess, however, that it took more time to reconcile me to the party round the table than to the viands with which it was covered. In truth they formed a motley group, reminding me now of a masquerade and then of a puppet show. I shall attempt to sketch a few of them as they then appeared to me, beginning, as etiquette demands, with the duchess.

" She was a tall, meagre woman of a certain age (that is to say on the wrong side of sixty). Her face bore the remains of beauty, [but injured by] a quantity of glaring rouge. Her dress was always simple in its materials and delicately clean. She meant the fashion to be English, I believe,—at least she used often to say, ' me voilà mise à l'Anglaise ' ; but as neither herself nor her faithful *femme de chambre* could or would condescend to seek for patterns from *les grosses bougeoises de ce Londres là bas* they constantly relapsed into the old French shapes. . . . She used to relate the story of her escape from France, and accounted herself the most fortunate of women for having, in company with her faithful *femme de chambre,* at last contrived to reach England with jewels enough concealed about their persons to secure them a modest competence. No small part of her good

fortune was the vicinity of her old friend the Marquis de L., a little thin, withered old man, with a face puckered with wrinkles, and a prodigious volubility of tongue. This gentleman had been madame's devoted beau for the last forty years. . . . They could not exist without an interchange of looks and sentiments, a mental intelligence, a gentle gallantry on the one side and a languishing listening on the other, which long habit had rendered as necessary to both as their snuff-box or their coffee.

"The next person in importance to the duchess was Madame de V., sister to the marquis. Her husband, who had acted in a diplomatic capacity in the stormy days preceding the Revolution, still maintained his station at the exiled court, and was at the moment of which I write employed on a secret embassy to an unnamed potentate. . . . In the dearth of Bourbon news this mysterious mission excited a lively and animated curiosity amongst these sprightly people.

"In person Madame de V. was quite a contrast to the duchess; short, very crooked, with the sharp, odd-looking face and keen eye that so often accompany deformity. She [used] a quantity of rouge and finery, mingling [together] ribands, feathers and beads of all the colours of the rainbow. She was on excel-

lent terms with all who knew her, and was also on the best terms with herself, in spite of the looking-glass, whose testimony indeed was so positively contradicted by certain couplets and acrostics addressed to her by M. le Comte de C., and the chevalier des I., the poets of the party, that to believe one uncivil dumb thing against two witnesses of such undoubted honour would have been a breach of politeness of which madame was incapable.

"The Chevalier des I. was a handsome man, tall, dark-visaged, and whiskered, with a look rather of the new than of the old French school, fierce and soldierly; he was accomplished too, played the flute, and wrote songs and enigmas. His wife, the prettiest of women, was the silliest Frenchwoman I ever encountered. She never opened her lips without uttering some *bêtise*. Her poor husband, himself not the wisest of men, quite dreaded her speaking.

"It happened that the Abbé de Lille, the celebrated French poet, and M. de Colonne, the ex-minister, had promised one Saturday to join the party in Brunswick Square. They came: and our chevalier [as a poet] could not miss so fair an opportunity of display. Accordingly, about half an hour before supper he put on a look of *distraction*, strode hastily two or three times up and down the room, slapped his fore-

head, and muttered a line or two to himself, then, calling hastily for pen and paper, began writing with the illegible rapidity of one who fears to lose a happy thought;—in short, he acted incomparably the whole agony of composition, and finally, with becoming diffidence, presented the impromptu to our worthy host, who immediately imparted it to the company. It was heard with lively approbation. At last the commerce of flattery ceased; the author's excuses, the ex-minister's and the great poet's thanks, and the applause of the audience died away.

"A pause [now] ensued which was broken by Madame des I., who had witnessed the whole scene with intense pleasure, and who exclaimed, with tears standing in her beautiful eyes, 'How glad I am they like the impromptu! My poor dear chevalier! No tongue can tell what pains it has cost him! There he was all yesterday evening writing, writing,—all the night long—never went to bed—all to-day—only finished just before we came. My poor dear chevalier! Now he'll be satisfied.'

"Be it recorded to the honour of French politeness that finding it impossible to stop or to out-talk her, the whole party pretended not to hear, and never once alluded to this impromptu *fait à loisir* till the discomforted

chevalier sneaked off with his pretty simpleton. Then to be sure they did laugh. . . .

"The Comtess de C. would have been very handsome but for one terrible drawback—she squinted. I cannot abide those 'cross eyes,' as the country people call them; but the French gentlemen did not seem to participate in my antipathy, for the countess was regarded as the beauty of the party. Agreeable she certainly was, lively and witty. . . . She had an agreeable little dog called Amour—a pug, the smallest and ugliest of the species, who regularly after supper used to jump out of a muff, where he had lain *perdu* all the evening, and make the round of the supper-table, begging cake and biscuits. He and I established a great friendship, and he would even venture, on hearing my voice, to pop his poor little black nose out of his hiding-place before the appointed time. It required several repetitions of *fi donc* from his mistress to drive him back behind the scenes till she gave him his cue.

"No uncommon object of her wit was the mania of a young smooth-faced little abbé, the politician *par eminence*, where all were politicians. M. l'Abbé must have been an exceeding bore to our English ministers, whom by his own showing he pestered weekly with laboured memorials,—plans for a rising in La Vendée,

schemes for an invasion, proposals to destroy the French fleet, offers to take Antwerp, and plots for carrying off Buonaparte from the opera-house and lodging him in the Tower of London. Imagine the abduction, and fancy him carried off by the unassisted prowess and dexterity of M. l'Abbé ! "

CHAPTER XI

THE GAY REALITIES OF MOLIÈRE

Dr. Mitford had set his heart upon his daughter's becoming an "accomplished musician," in spite of her having, as she tells us, "neither ear, nor taste, nor application." Her first music master in Hans Place failing to bring about any improvement in her playing upon the piano, she was removed from his tuition and placed under that of a German professor, "an impatient, irritable man of genius," who, in his turn, soon summarily dismissed his pupil! "Things being in this unpromising state," she writes, "I began to entertain some hope that my musical education would be given up altogether. This time [however] my father threw the blame upon the instrument, and he now resolved that I should become a great performer upon the harp.

"It happened that our school-house . . . was so built that the principal reception-room was connected with the entrance-hall by a long passage and two double doors. This room, fitted

up with nicely bound books, contained, amongst other musical instruments, the harp upon which I was sent to practise every morning. I was sent alone, [and was] most comfortably out of sight and hearing of every individual in the house, the only means of approach being through the two resounding green baize doors, swinging to with a heavy bang the moment they were let go. As the change from piano to harp . . . had by no means worked a miracle, I very shortly betook myself to the book-shelves, and seeing a row of octavo volumes lettered *Théâtre de Voltaire,* I selected one of them and had deposited it in front of the music-stand and perched myself upon the stool to read it in less time than an ordinary pupil would have consumed in getting through the first three bars of *Ar Hyd y Nos.*

"The play upon which I opened was *Zaïre.* There was a certain romance in the situation, an interest in the story. . . . So I got through *Zaïre,* and when I had finished *Zaïre* I proceeded to other plays—*Ædipe, Mérope, Algire, Mahomet,* plays well worth reading, but not so absorbing as to prevent my giving due attention to the warning doors, and putting the book in its place, and striking the chords of *Ar Hyd y Nos* as often as I heard a step approaching.

"But when the dramas of Voltaire were

exhausted and I had recourse to some neighbouring volumes the state of matters changed at once. The new volumes contained the comedies of Molière, and once plunged into the gay realities of this delightful world, all the miseries of this globe of ours—harp, music-books, practisings, and lessons—were forgotten. . . . I never remembered that there was such a thing as time; I never heard the warning doors; the only tribulations that troubled me were the tribulations of *Sganarelle*, the only lessons I thought about—the lessons of the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme.' So I was caught; caught in the very act of laughing till I cried over the apostrophes of the angry father to the galley, in which he is told his son has been taken captive, 'Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère!'

"Luckily, however, the person who discovered my delinquency was one of my chief spoilers—the husband of our good school mistress. Accordingly when he could speak for laughing, what he said sounded far more like a compliment upon my relish for the comic drama than a rebuke. I suppose that he spoke to the same effect to my father. At all events the issue of the affair was the dismissal of the poor little harp mistress and a present of a cheap edition of Molière for my own reading."

And writing in after years Miss Mitford says: "I have got the set still—twelve little foreign-looking books, unbound, and covered with a gay-looking pink paper, mottled with red, like certain carnations."

Miss Mitford tells us in the Introduction to one of her works that her father had engaged the English teacher Miss Rowden, of whom we have already spoken, to act as a sort of private tutor—a governess out of school hours to his young daughter.

"At the time I was placed under her care," writes Mary, "her whole heart was in the drama, especially as personified by John Kemble; and I am persuaded that she thought she could in no way so well perform her duty as in taking me to Drury Lane whenever his name was in the bills.

"It was a time of great actors—Jack Bannister and Jack Johnstone, Fawcett and Emery, Lewis and Munden, Mrs. Davenport, Miss Pope and Mrs. Jordan (most exquisite of all) made comedy a bright and living art, an art as full as life itself of laughter and tears.

"My enthusiasm for the drama soon equalled that of Miss Rowden. . . . There was of course a great difference in kind between her pleasure and mine; hers was a critical, mine a childish enjoyment; she loved fine acting, I loved the play."

Writing in later years of her pleasure, however imperfect then, in the acting of "the glorious family of Kemble," she says: "The fame of John Kemble . . . has suffered not a little by the contact with his great sister. Besides her uncontested and incontestable power Mrs. Siddons had one advantage not always allowed for —she was a woman. The actress must always be dearer than the actor, goes closer to the heart, draws tenderer tears. . . . Add that the tragedy in which they were best remembered was one in which the heroine must always predominate, for Lady Macbeth is the moving spirit of the play. But the characters of more equality—Katherine and Wolsey, Hermione and Leontes, Coriolanus and Volumnia, Hamlet and the Queen—and surely John Kemble may hold his own. How often have I seen them in those plays! What would I give to see again those plays so acted!"

In the year 1802, when Mary was fourteen years of age, her thirst for knowledge was growing rapidly. Miss Rowden happened to be reading Virgil, and Mary longed to be able to read it also. "I have just taken a lesson in Latin," she writes to her mother, "but I shall in consequence omit some of my other business. It is so extremely like Italian that I think I shall find it much easier than I expected."

"I told you," she says in a letter to her father, "that I had finished the *Iliad*, which I admire beyond anything I ever read. I have begun the *Æneid*, which I cannot say I admire so much. Dryden is so fond of triplets and Alexandrines that it is much heavier reading; . . . when I have finished it I shall read the *Odyssey*. . . . I am now reading that beautiful opera of Metastasio, *Themistocles*, and when I have finished that I shall read Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*. His poetry is really heavenly."

Again she writes, "I went to the library the other day with Miss Rowden and brought back the first volume of Goldsmith's *Animated Nature*. It is quite a lady's natural history, and extremely entertaining. . . . The only fault is its length. There are eight volumes. But as I read it to myself, and read pretty quick, I shall soon get through it. I am likewise reading the *Odyssey*, which I even prefer to the *Iliad*. I think it beautiful beyond comparison."

Mrs. Mitford was staying in town in the summer of 1802, and she writes to her husband: "You would have laughed yesterday when M. St. Quintin was reading Mary's English composition, of which the subject was, 'The advantage of a well-cultivated mind'; a word struck him as needless to be inserted, and which after objecting to it he was going to expunge.

Mam Bonette (a pet name), in her pretty meek way, urged the necessity of the word used. Miss Rowden was then applied to. She and I both asserted that the sentence would be incomplete without it. St. Quintin, on a more deliberate view of the subject, with all the liberality which is so amiable a point in his character, begged our daughter's pardon, and the passage remained as it originally stood."

A young French girl, Mlle. Rose, had recently become an inmate of the schoolroom. She was an orphan, and her venerable grandparents, who belonged to a noble Bretonne family, were now dependent upon her for support. The three were to be seen occasionally at M. St. Quintin's hospitable supper-parties, and on such occasions Rose "always brought with her some ingenious straw-plaiting to make into fancy bonnets, which were then in vogue. . . . She was a pallid, drooping creature, whose dark eyes looked too large for her face." She now brought her straw-plaiting into the schoolroom and also assisted in teaching French to the pupils.

"About this time a little girl named Betsy, of a short, squat figure, plain in face and ill-dressed and overdressed, appeared at the school, brought by her father. They happened to arrive at the same time with the French dancing

master, a marquis of the *ancien régime*. I never saw such a contrast between two men. The Frenchman was slim, long and pale, and allowing always for the dancing-master air, he might be called elegant. The Englishman was the beau-ideal of a John Bull, portentous in size, broad and red of visage, and loud of tongue. He did not stay five minutes, but that was time enough to strike monsieur with horror . . . especially when his first words conveyed an injunction to the lady of the house 'to take care that no grinning Frenchman had the ordering of his Betsy's feet. If she must learn to dance, let her be taught by an honest Englishman.'

"Poor Betsy! there she sat, the tears trickling down her cheeks, little comforted by the kind notice of the governess and the English teacher. I made some girlish advances towards acquaintanceship which she was too shy or too miserable to return. . . .

"For the present she seemed to have attached herself to Mademoiselle Rose. She had crept to the side of the young French woman and watched her as she wove her straw plaits. She had also attempted the simple art with some discarded straws, and when mademoiselle had so far roused herself as to show her the proper way, she soon became an efficient assistant.

"No intercourse took place between them.

Indeed none was possible since neither knew a word of the other's language. Betsy was silence personified, and poor Mlle. Rose was now more than ever dejected. An opportunity of returning to France had opened to her and to her grand-parents, and was passing away. The expenses of the journey were beyond her means. So she sighed over her straw-plaiting and submitted.

"In the meantime the second Saturday after the new pupil's coming to school arrived, and with it a summons home to Betsy, who, for the first time gathering courage to address our good governess, asked 'if she might be trusted with the bonnet Mlle. Rose had just finished, to show her aunt—she knew she would like to buy that bonnet because mademoiselle had been so good as to let her assist in plaiting it.' Our good governess ordered the bonnet to be put into the carriage, told her the price, called her a good child, and took leave of her till Monday.

"Two hours after, Betsy and her father reappeared in the schoolroom. 'Ma'amselle,' said he, bawling as loud as he could with the view evidently of making her understand him, 'Ma'amselle, I've no great love for the French, whom I take to be our natural enemies. But you're a good young woman; you've been kind to my Betsy, and have taught her to make

your fal-lals. She says that she thinks you're fretting because you can't manage to take your grandfather and grandmother back to France again ; so as you let her help you in that other handiwork, why you must let her help you in this.' Then throwing a heavy purse into her lap and catching his little daughter up in his arms he departed, leaving poor Mlle. Rose too much bewildered to speak or to comprehend the happiness that had fallen upon her."

CHAPTER XII

RECOLLECTIONS OF OLD READING

In the spring of the year 1802 Dr. Mitford purchased an old farm-house with its surrounding fields amounting to about seventy acres, near to the small village of Graseley, which lies about three miles to the south of Reading. The house, known as Graseley Court, had been built in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and it possessed fine rooms with ornamental panelling, oriel windows and a great oaken staircase with massive balustrades. It had fallen out of repair, and the doctor's first plan was to carry out such restorations only as would make it a comfortable dwelling-place for himself and his family. But unfortunately he soon abandoned this plan and determined to pull down the old house and to build upon its site a new and spacious mansion. Dr. Mitford had little appreciation of the beauty he was destroying, nor did he foresee the large sums of money that would be sunk in this undertaking.

Mary's school life came to an end at the close

STRIKING LIKENESSES TAKEN IN THIS MANNER *ONE GUINEA EACH*

of the year 1802, when she had just reached the age of fifteen. Her connection, however, with Hans Place was not over, for she paid happy visits from time to time to the St. Quintins and Miss Rowden, going to the London theatres, hearing concerts, and seeing interesting society under their auspices.

Her first introduction to the Reading gaieties of a grown-up order was to be at the Race Ball in August, 1803. "At these balls," we are told, "it was the custom for the steward of the races to dance with the young ladies who then came out." After alluding to the distress felt by one of her companions on having to dance with a stranger on such an occasion, Mary writes in 1802: "I think myself very fortunate that Mr. Shaw Lefevre will be steward next year, for by that time I shall hope to know him well enough to render the undertaking of dancing with him less disagreeable."

"The public amusements of the town," she writes, "as I remember them at bonny fifteen were sober enough. They were limited to an annual visit from a respectable company of actors, the theatre being very well conducted and exceedingly ill-attended; to biennial concerts . . . rather better patronized, to almost weekly incursions from itinerant lecturers on all the arts and sciences, and from prodigies of

every kind, whether three-year-old fiddlers or learned dogs."

"The good town of Belford [Reading]," she tells us, "was the paradise of ill-jointured widows and portionless old-maids. They met in the tableland of gentility, passing their mornings in calls at each other's houses and their evenings in small tea-parties, seasoned with a rubber or a pool, and garnished with a little quiet gossiping . . . which their habits required. The part of the town in which they chiefly congregated, the lady's *quarter*, was one hilly corner of the parish of St. Nicholas, a sort of highland district, all made up of short Rows and pigmy Places entirely uncontaminated by the vulgarity of shops."

Miss Mitford has given us many a racy description of the type of small tradespeople of the period. Here is one of them :—

"The greatest man in these parts (I use the word in the sense of Louis-le-Gros, not Louis-le-Grand) is our worthy neighbour Stephen Lane, the grazier ex-butcher of Belford. Nothing so big hath been seen since Lambert the gaoler or the Durham ox.

"When he walks he overfills the pavement and is more difficult to pass than a link of full-dressed misses or a chain of becloaked dandies. . . . Chairs crack under him, couches rock, bolsters groan and floors tremble. . . . .

" Tailors, although he was a liberal and punctual paymaster, dreaded his custom. It was not only the quantity of material that he took, and yet that cloth universally called 'broad' was not broad enough for him ; it was not only the stuff but the work—the sewing, stitching, plaiting and button-holing without end. The very shears grew weary of their labours."

For a contrast to this personage we have " little Miss Philly Firkin the china woman," whose shop stood in a narrow twisting lane called Oriel Street. This street was cribbed and confined on one side by the remains of an old monastic building, and after winding round the churchyard of St. Stephens with an awkward curve it finally abutted upon the market-place. So popular was this " incommodious avenue of shops " that nobody dreamt of visiting Belford without desiring to purchase something there, so that " horse-people and foot-people jostled upon its pavement," whilst " coaches and phaetons ran against each other in the road." Of all the shops the prettiest and most sought after was that of Miss Philly Firkin.

" She herself was in appearance most fit to be its inhabitant, being a trim, prim little woman, whose dress hung about her in stiff, regular folds, very like the drapery of a china

shepherdess on a mantelpiece, and whose pink and white complexion . . . had the same professional hue. Change her spruce cap for a wide-brimmed hat and the damask napkin which she flourished in wiping her wares for a china crook and the figure in question might have passed for a miniature of the mistress. In one respect they differed. The china shepherdess was a silent personage. Miss Philadelphia was not; on the contrary, she was reckoned to make . . . as good a use of her tongue as any woman, gentle or simple, in the whole town of Belford."

Miss Mitford describes another female shopkeeper of those days, "a reduced gentlewoman by name Mrs. Martin, who endeavoured to eke out a small annuity by letting lodgings at eight shillings a week, and by keeping a toyshop. The whole stock (of the little shop)—fiddles, drums, balls, dolls and shuttle-cocks—might be easily appraised at under eight pounds, including a stately rocking-horse, the poor widow's *cheval de bataille*, which had occupied one side of Mrs. Martin's shop from the time of her setting up in business, and still continued to keep his station, uncheapened by her thrifty customers."

When a certain Mr. Singleton, we are told, was ordained curate of St. Nicholas after taking his degrees at college with "respectable mediocrity" he was attracted by the appearance of

the rooms above the toyshop, "and there by the advice of Dr. Grampound (the Rector) did he place himself on his arrival at Belford. He occupied the first floor, consisting of the sitting-room—a pleasant apartment with one window abutting on the High Bridge and the other on the market-place, also a small chamber behind with its tent-bed and dimity furniture." And there the curate continued "to live for full thirty years with the selfsame spare, quiet, decent landlady and her small serving maiden Patty, a demure, civil damsel dwarfed as it should seem by constant curtseying. . . . Except for the clock of time, which, however imperceptibly, does still keep moving, everything about the little toyshop was at a standstill. The very tabby cat, which lay basking on the hearth, might have passed for his progenitor of happy memory, who took his station there the night of Mr. Singleton's arrival; and the selfsame hobby-horse still stood rocking opposite the counter, the admiration of every urchin who passed the door.

"There the rocking-horse remained, and there remained Mr. Singleton, gradually advancing from a personable youth to a portly middle-aged man."

We have already mentioned the frequent small fairs that were held in the market-place

from time to time, but the chief event of the year in such matters was the Reading Great Fair, which took place regularly upon May Day. "It was a scene of business as well as of pleasure," writes Mary Mitford, "being not only a great market for horses and cattle, but one of the principal marts for the celebrated cheese of the great dairy counties. . . . Before the actual fair day waggon after waggon, laden with the round, hard, heavy merchandise, rumbled slowly into the Forbury, where the great space before the school-house was fairly covered with stacks of Cheddar and North Wilts.

"Fancy the singular effect of piles of cheeses several feet high extending over a whole large cricket ground, and divided only by narrow paths littered with straw, amongst which wandered chapmen offering a taste of their wares to their cautious customers, the country shopkeepers (who poured in from every village within twenty miles), and to the thrifty housewives of the town. . . . Fancy the effect of this remarkable scene, surrounded by the usual moving picture of a fair, the fine Gothic church of St. Nicholas on one side, the old arch of the Abbey and the abrupt eminence called Forbury Hill, crowned with a grand clump of trees, on the other. . . . When lighted up at night it was, perhaps, still more fantastic and attractive,

THE OLD MARKET PLACE, READING

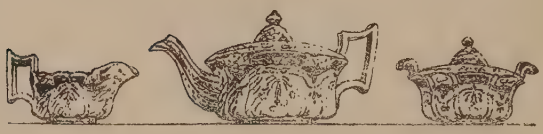
when the roars and howlings of the travelling wild beasts used to mingle so grotesquely with the drums, trumpets and fiddles of the dramatic and equestrian exhibitions, and the laugh and shout and song of the merry visitors."

In the year 1804 the building of the large new house at Graseley was completed, and it received the name of Bertram House, so called in honour of the Mitfords' Norman ancestor, Sir Robert Bertram. The doctor's usual extravagance was shown in the style of its decorations and furniture, which were little suited to his small and modest family.

We have visited Bertram House. It is a large square white building of little architectural beauty, but there is beauty in a wide verandah standing at the summit of a broad flight of stone steps leading up to the entrance, which is completely festooned by roses and honeysuckles. The house faces spreading lawns and gay flower-beds, whilst its approach from the lane hard by is beneath an avenue of tall limes. Fields stretch far away behind the building, their "richly timbered hedgerows edging into wild, rude and solemn fir plantations."

Here Mary Mitford passed sixteen years of her life, and here she got to know and love not only their own beautiful grounds but also

every turn of the surrounding shady lanes, where the first violets and primroses were to be found, and delighted in the wide expanse of its neighbouring common gay with gorse and broom. Many of her pastoral stories are connected with this smiling country.



CHAPTER XIII

A NORTHERN TOUR

In the autumn of the year 1806 Mary Mitford, then eighteen years of age, was taken by her father for a tour in the north of England with a view of introducing her to his relations in Northumberland. The head of the family was Mitford of Mitford Castle, a fine old Saxon edifice that stands on high ground above the river Wansbeck at a point where two fords meet, and from which circumstance the name Mid-ford is derived.

Miss Mitford speaks in her *Recollections* of "the massive ruins of the castle" as "the common ancestral home of our race and name," and tells us "of the wild and daring Wansbeck almost girdling it as a moat."

The castle is about two miles distant from Morpeth, and there is a quaint rhyme still current in the north-country which runs as follows :—

"Midford was Midford ere Morpeth was ane,
And still shall be Midford when Morpeth is gane."

At the time of the Norman Conquest it appears that the castle and barony were in the possession of a certain Robert de Mitford, whose only child and heiress was a daughter named Sibella. This daughter was given in marriage by the Conqueror to one of his knights—Sir Robert Bertram—who had fought in the battle of Hastings. It seems that there is a curious entry respecting this same knight in a contemporary document written in Norman French to the effect that Sir Robert Bertram *estoit tort* (crooked). One would like to know if the Saxon maid was happy with her deformed husband, but the old chronicles are of course silent on that subject.[1]

It was on the 20th day of September (1806) that Mary Mitford, together with her father and her father's cousin, Mr. Nathaniel Ogle, who possessed an estate in Northumberland, started upon their northern tour. They travelled to London by stage-coach, but performed the rest of their journey in Mr. Ogle's private carriage. Having changed horses at Waltham Cross and again at Wade's Mill, they halted at Royston for the first night, and then, continuing their journey with various other haltings, reached Little Harle Tower in Northumberland a few days later.

[1] See *Memories*, by Lord Redesdale, K.C.B., published 1915.

Little Harle Tower, which stands in a romantic glen through which the Wansbeck flows, was to be the headquarters of the Mitfords during their tour. It was the property of Lord and Lady Charles Murray Aynsley, Lord Charles having taken the name of Aynsley on account of a large property left to his wife by a relative of that name. He was a son of the Duchess of Athol. Perhaps the reader may remember his appearance in an early chapter of this work as a very bashful young man. Lady Charles was a first cousin of Dr. Mitford's.

Mary writes to her mother from Little Harle Tower on September 28th: "I imagine Papa has told you all our plans, which are extremely pleasant. Lord and Lady Charles stay longer in the country on purpose to receive us, and have put off their visit to Alnwick Castle that they may take us there, as well as to Lord Grey's, Colonel Beaumont's and half a dozen other places. . . . The post, which *never* goes oftener than three times a week from hence, will not allow our writing again till Wednesday, when we go to Sir William Lorraine's, and hope to get a frank from Colonel Beaumont whom we are to meet there."

This was Mary Mitford's first introduction into what is called high society, and the simplicity of her ordinary life made her specially enjoy her new experiences.

The Beaumonts were people of large property, and Mary describes the wonderful attire of Mrs. Beaumont, who appeared at the Lorraines' dinner-party (although it was supposed to be a small informal gathering) in a lavender satin dress covered with Mechlin lace, and whose jewels consisted of amethysts of priceless value forming a waist-belt, a bandeau, a tiara, armlets, bracelets, etc. etc. to match. Lady Lorraine's dress was quite different. "Her ladyship is a small, delicate woman," writes Mary, "and she wore a plain cambric gown and a small chip hat, without any sort of ornament either on her head or neck."

Mary made mental notes concerning many of her new acquaintance. She describes a certain Mr. M. as "an oddity from affectation." "And I often think," she adds, "that no young man affects singularity when he can distinguish himself by something better."

Writing from Kirkley, Mr. Ogle's property, on October 8th, Mary says: "We go to-morrow to Alnwick and return the same night. I will write you a long account of our stately visit when I return to Morpeth."

Alnwick Castle was at that time the abode of the Dowager Duchess of Athol, the mother of Lord Charles Murray Aynsley. This same Duchess was also (in her own right) Baroness

Strange and Lady of Man. Her husband, the third Duke of Athol, had died some thirty years before, and ever since his death she seems to have enjoyed a position of ever-increasing power and authority.

"To-morrow," writes Mary, "is expected to be a very full day at the Castle on account of the Sessions Ball. The ladies—the married ones I mean—go in court dresses without hoops, and display their diamonds and finery upon the occasion."

Mary had to make her preparations accordingly. "You would have been greatly amused," she writes, "at my having my hair cut by Lord Charles's *frisseur*, who is by occupation a joiner, and actually attended me with an apron covered with glue and a rule in his hand instead of scissors.

"Thursday morning we rose early. I wore my ball dress, and Lady C. lent me a beautiful necklace of Scotch pebbles very elegantly set, with brooches and ornaments to match. My dress was never the least discomposed during the whole day, though we travelled thirty miles of dreadful roads to the Castle. Lord Charles's horses had been sent on to Framlington (eighteen miles) the day before, and we took four post horses from Cambo to that place. We set out at eleven and reached Framlington by two.

. . . We passed Netherwitten . . . and Sworland, the magnificent seat of the famous Alexander Davison. I had likewise a good view of the beautiful Roadly Craggs, by which the road passes, and likewise over some of the moors.

" The entrance to Alnwick Castle is extremely striking. After passing through three massive gateways you alight and enter a most magnificent hall, lined with servants, who repeat your name to those stationed on the stairs ; these again re-echo the sound from one to the other, till you find yourself in a most sumptuous drawing-room of great size and, as I should imagine, forty feet in height. This is at least rather formidable, but the sweetness of the Duchess soon did away every impression but that of admiration. We arrived first, and Lady Charles introduced me with particular distinction to the whole family ; and during the whole day I was never for one instant unaccompanied by one of the charming Lady Percys, and principally by Lady Emily, the youngest and most beautiful.

" We sat down sixty-five to dinner. . . . The dinner of course was served on plate, and the middle of the table was decorated by a sumptuous *plateau*. I met Sir Charles Monck, my cousin of Mitford, and several people I had known at Little Harle. After dinner when the

Duchess found Lady Charles absolutely refused to stay all night, she resolved at least that I should see the Castle, and sent Lady Emily to show me the library, chapel, state bedrooms, etc., and, thinking I was fond of dancing, she persuaded Lady C. to go for an hour with herself and family to the Sessions Ball, which was held that night.

"The Duchess is still a most lovely woman, and dresses with particular elegance. She wore a helmet of diamonds. The young ladies were elegantly dressed in white and gold. The news of Lord Percy's election arrived after dinner.

"At nine we went to the ball given in the town, and the room was so bad and the heat so excessive that I determined, considering the long journey we had to take, not to dance, and refused my cousin Mitford of Mitford, Mr. Selby, Mr. Alder, and half a dozen whose names I have forgotten. At half-past ten we took leave of the Duchess and her amiable daughters and commenced our journey homeward. . . .

"We went on very quietly for some time when we suddenly discovered that we had come about six miles out of our way. . . . This so much delayed us that it was near seven o'clock in the morning before we reached home [Morpeth]. Seventy miles, a splendid dinner and a

ball all in one day! Was not this a spirited expedition?"

Mary was well placed for enjoyment during this tour. "My cousins," she writes in later life, "were acquainted, as it seemed to me, with everyone of consequence in the county, and were themselves two of the most popular persons it contained, [so] as the young relative and companion of this amiable couple, I saw the country and its inhabitants to great advantage."

Mary mentions two younger sisters of Lady Charles—Mary and Charlotte Mitford—cousins of whom she became fond. They often accompanied the travellers in their visiting tours, as did also the Aynsleys' only son, whom she speaks of as her father's "dear godson, and the finest boy you ever saw."

Writing from Morpeth, where her father's uncle, old Mr. Mitford, and her cousins lived, she speaks of a plan for a tour in the northern part of the county arranged by Sir Charles and Lady Aynsley for her entertainment. "When I go back to Little Harle," she says, "we shall set out for Admiral Roddam's upon the Cheviot Hills, Lord Tankerville's and Lord Grey's. . . . I am so happy in this opportunity of seeing the Cheviot Hills." The tour proved a very pleasant and interesting one. The party travelled in a coach and four, the road sometimes taking them

across the summit of the Cheviots and "above the clouds." They visited Fallerton and Simonsburn and also Hexham—her father's birthplace—finally halting at Alnwick.

At this time Mary was put into an awkward position by her father suddenly quitting her and returning in all haste to Reading in order to further the Parliamentary election of Mr. Shaw Lefevre, thus cancelling all his engagements with their relatives and friends. She wrote to urge his return, and finally he did so on the 3rd November, and towards the end of the month both father and daughter returned home.

Late in life, recording the various events of her tour in the north, Mary writes: "Years many and changeful have gone by since I trod those northern braes; they at whose side I stood lie under the green sod; yet still as I read of the Tyne or of the Wansbeck the bright rivers sparkle before me, as if I had walked beside them but yesterday. I still seem to stand with my dear father under the grey walls of that grand old abbey church at Hexham whilst he points to the haunts of his boyhood. Bright river Wansbeck! How many pleasant memories I owe to thy mere name!"

CHAPTER XIV

A ROYAL VISIT

BEFORE quitting the pleasant society of Lord and Lady Charles Aynsley we should like to introduce an incident in connection with them which took place in the month of February, 1808. This was no less an event than a visit from the exiled King Louis XVIII and his suite to Lord Charles and his wife at the Deanery of Bocking.

Here we would explain that the post of Dean in connection with Bocking Church, which is not a cathedral, was of a curious nature. It seems that by an old ecclesiastical ordinance a set of clergymen were called the Archbishop of Canterbury's "Peculiars," and that his Commissary and Head of the Peculiars in Essex and Suffolk was constituted Dean of Bocking, a post of such dignity that the Dean was wholly independent of the Bishop of his diocese.[1]

[1] See *History of the County of Essex*, by Thos. Wright, published 1836.

GOSFIELD HALL

A Royal Visit

At the time of which we are writing the French King was residing at Gosfield Hall, a mansion lent to him by the Marquess of Buckingham upon his arrival in England during the previous month of November. There, we are told, a mimic court was held in strict accordance with Bourbon traditions; and even the old French custom of the King's dining in public was preserved. On such occasions the inhabitants of the surrounding neighbourhood were permitted to pass in procession through the long dining-room to witness the sight.

In spite, however, of their courtly ceremonies the purses of these royal exiles do not seem to have been very full, to judge by the following story. It was told some years ago by an old Essex woman who could remember when a child seeing the King and his attendants out walking. The King noticed the child and was disposed to give her something, but the royal pockets were searched in vain for a coin of any kind. At last one of the suite produced a halfpenny. "I ought to have kept that halfpenny," remarked the old dame.

The visit of Louis XVIII to the Bocking Deanery, which took place on February 18th, is described in a letter from Lady Charles Aynsley to her cousin, Mrs. Mitford, to whom she also sent a copy of the *Chelmsford Chronicle*

of February 26th, which contained a paragraph describing the event.

Fortunately the editors of the *Chelmsford Chronicle*, which has existed for more than one hundred and fifty years, have kept an unbroken file of its numbers, so that we have been able to study the very paragraph in question. Mrs. Mitford incorporates the two accounts in a letter to her husband, but where certain details in this newspaper are omitted, we have introduced them between brackets.

In explanation of an allusion to a severe snowstorm which it was feared might prevent the royal visit from taking place, we would remark that an examination of several numbers of the paper prove that the month of February, 1808, was marked by a prevalence of violent gales of wind and heavy falls of snow. A large number of ships are reported to have foundered, seawalls were broken down in many places, and the Margate pier totally destroyed. "From the extraordinary falls of snow," writes a journalist, "the usual communication between the metropolis and the distant parts of the kingdom has been nearly impracticable. The Portsmouth mail coach is reported to have lost its way in the snowstorm, and many accidents to passengers in other mail coaches are related."

"At Hatfield Peveral," states a writer,

Dantoux

LE COMTE D'ARTOIS
(AFTERWARDS CHARLES X)

"twenty sheep and lambs were buried in a snow-drift, but were rescued owing to the sagacity of the shepherd's dog." A solitary sheep elsewhere "remained buried in the snow for eight days. When at last dug out it was discovered to be actually alive! It had found wurzels in the ground and had fed upon them."

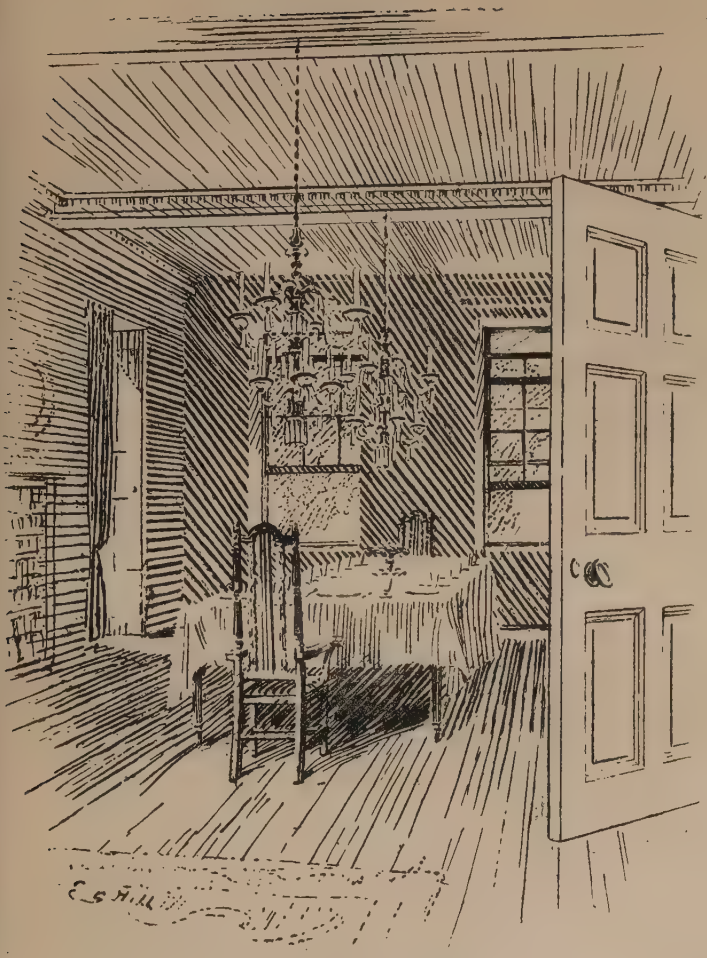
Mrs. Mitford writes to her husband on receiving Lady Charles Aynsley's letter from Bocking :—

"Her ladyship has been in a very grand bustle, as the King of France, Monsieur (the Comte d'Artois), the Duke d'Angoulême, Duke de Berry, Duke de Grammont and the Prince de Condé, with all the nobles that composed His Majesty's suite at Gosfield, dined at the Deanery last Thursday. Mr. and Mrs. Pepper (Lady Fitzgerald's daughter) were asked to meet him, because she was brought up and educated at the French Court in Louis XVI's reign; General and Mrs. Milner for the same reason, and Colonel, Mrs. and Miss Burgoyne—all the party quick at languages.

"The [snow]storms alarmed Lady C. not a little, for it prevented the carrier going to town in the first instance, and in the second she began to fear the King might not be able to come, after all the preparations made for him. The Milners were so anxious about it that the

General, who commands at Colchester, ordered five hundred pioneers to clear the road from that city to Bocking. On His Majesty's approach the Bocking bells proclaimed it, and on driving up, the full military band which Lord C. had engaged for the occasion struck up 'God save the King' in the entrance passage. In His Majesty's coach were Monsieur [the Comte d'Artois] and the Dukes d'Angoulême and Berry. [They arrived a little before five o'clock, and Lady Charles handed His Majesty from his carriage into the drawing-room, and introduced the illustrious guest to those friends who were invited upon this interesting occasion. His Majesty in the most affable and engaging manner entered into conversation with every individual present.]

"All stood," continues Mrs. Mitford, "till dinner was announced, when our cousin handed His Majesty—Lord C. walking before him with a candle. The King sat at the top of the table with Lady C. on his right and Lord C. on his left. Mrs. Milner's and Mrs. Pepper's French butlers were lent for the occasion. The bill of fare was in French, and the King appeared well pleased with his entertainment. [The French nobility, who compose His Majesty's suite, were in full dress and wore the insignia of their respective orders.]



WHERE THE KING DINED

"The company were three hours at dinner, and at eight the dessert was placed on the table —claret and all kinds of French wine, fruit, etc., a beautiful cake at the top with 'Vive le Roi de France' baked round it, and the quarterings of the French army in coloured pastry, which had a novel and pretty effect. The three youngest children then entered with white satin military sashes over their shoulders (upon which were) painted in bronze 'Vive le Roi de France—Prospérité à Louis dix-huit.' Charles, on being asked for a toast, immediately gave 'The King of France,' which was drunk with the utmost sensibility by all present, and one of the little girls came up to His Majesty and, with great expression, spoke the lines in French, composed for the occasion.

"Louis soon followed the ladies into the drawing-room, when again all stood, and Lady C. served her royal guest with coffee, which being over, she told him that some of the neighbouring families were come for a little dance in the dining-room and that perhaps His Majesty would be seated at cards. He good humouredly said he would first go and pay his respects in the next room, which was the thing she wished; therefore handed him in, his family and nobles following, which was a fine sight for those assembled, in all sixty-two. At the

King's desire she introduced each person to him by name, and, on the King's sitting down, the band struck up, and Monsieur, who is supposed to be the finest dancer in Europe, led off with Lady C., who, spite of Lord Charles's horror and her own fears for her lame ankle, hopped down two country dances with him, and they were followed by Charlotte and the Duke d'Angoulême."

We have sat in the long dining-room at the Deanery where these festivities took place more than a hundred years ago. The room is evidently little changed, and as we gazed around, the whole scene seemed to rise before our eyes. We saw the French guests in their stars and orders sparkling under the lights of the chandeliers, and it seemed almost as if an echo of their bright racy talk reached our ears.

CHAPTER XV

PLAYS AND POETRY

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD had from early youth been fond of writing verses upon subjects which had taken her fancy. "No less than three octavo volumes," she writes, "had I perpetrated in two years. They had all the faults incident to a young lady's verses, and one of them had been deservedly castigated by the *Quarterly*." Here she adds in later years the following footnote: "This article was fortunate for the writer at a far more important moment. Mr. Gifford himself, as I have been given to understand, came to feel that however well deserved the strictures might be, an attack by his great review upon a girl's first book was something like breaking a butterfly upon the wheel. He made amends by a criticism in a very different spirit on the first series of *Our Village*, which was of much service to the work."

The first volume of poems was published in the year 1810 and again with additions in 1811. Two more volumes followed soon afterwards.

In spite of some adverse criticism the poems "had had their praises," writes Miss Mitford, "as what young lady's verses have not? Large impressions had gone rapidly off; we had run into a second edition. They had been published in America—always so kind to me! Two or three of the shorter pieces had been thought good enough to be stolen, and Mr. Coleridge had prophesied of the larger one that the authoress of 'Blanche' would write a tragedy."

Among the shorter poems was one upon the death of Sir John Moore, written on February 7th, 1809, eight years before the appearance of Wolfe's well-known poem. It does not equal that poem in merit; but the following lines, which close the dirge, seem to us to bear the true ring of poetry:—

"No tawdry 'scutcheons hang around thy tomb,
No hired mourners wave the sabled plume,
No statues rise to mark the sacred spot,
No pealing organ swells the solemn note.
A hurried grave thy soldiers' hands prepare—
Thy soldiers' hands the mournful burthen bear;
The vaulted sky to earth's extremest verge
Thy canopy; the cannon's roar thy dirge."

Mary was only twenty-one years of age when she wrote these lines, and there is another poem belonging to the same period that is worthy of quotation entitled "Westminster Abbey."

When viewing the tombs in Poets' Corner she writes :—

> " The brightest union Genius wrought
> Was Garrick's voice and Shakespeare's thought."

About this same time Miss Mitford wrote a narrative poem entitled " Christina " which had good success, especially in America, where it passed through several editions.

Coleridge's prophecy that the author of " Blanche " would write a tragedy was fulfilled eventually, but in the meantime her taste for the drama, stimulated when a school-girl by Molière's inimitable plays, was now being further developed.

" Every third year," writes Mary, " a noble form of tragedy, one with which women are seldom brought in contact, fell in my way. Dr. Valpy, the master of Reading School . . . had wisely substituted the representation of one of the stern Greek plays [given in the original language] for the speeches and recitations formerly delivered before the heads of certain colleges of Oxford at their triennial visitations.[1]

" Many of the old pupils will remember the effect of these performances, complete in scenery, dresses and decorations, and remark-

[1] Dr. Valpy was thus the pioneer of an important movement to be adopted in later years by our great Universities.

able for the effect produced, not only on the actors, but on an audience, of which a considerable portion was new alike to the language and the subject. It is no offence to impute such ignorance to the mayor and aldermen of that day who in their furred gowns formed part of the official visitors, or to the mammas and sisters of the performers, who might plead the privilege of sex for their want of learning.

"For myself, as ignorant of Latin or of Greek as the smuggest alderman or slimmest damsel present, I had my own share in the pageant. In spite of all remonstrance the dear Doctor would insist on my writing the authorised account of the play—the grand official critique which filled I know not how many columns of *The Reading Mercury*, and was sent east, west, north and south wherever mammas and grandmammas were found. Of course it was necessary to mention everybody and to commit all the injustice which belongs to a forced equality by praising some too little and some too much. The too little was more frequent than the too much, for the boys, as a body, did act marvellously, especially those who filled the female parts, making one understand how the ungentle sex might have rendered the Desdemonas and the Imogens in James's day. . . . One circumstance only a little injured the perfect grouping

DR. VALPY'S SCHOOL

of the scene. The visitation occurred in October, not long after the conclusion of the summer holidays, and between cricket and boating and the impossibility of wearing gloves . . . our Helens and Antigones exhibited an assortment of sunburnt fists that might have become a tribe of Red Indians. . . . Sophocles is Sophocles nevertheless ; and seldom can his power have been more thoroughly felt than in these performances at Reading School.

" The good Doctor," she continues, " full of kindness, and far too learned for pedantry, rewarded my compliance with his wishes in the way I liked best, by helping me to enter into the spirit of the mighty masters who dealt forth these stern Tragedies of Destiny. He put into my hands le Père Brumoy's ' Théâtre des Grecs,' and other translations in homely French prose, where the form and letter were set forth, untroubled by vexatious attempts at English verse—grand outlines for imagination to colour and fill up."

In the month of May, 1809, Mary was staying in Hans Place with her friend Miss Rowden, who had become the Head of the school on the retirement of Monsieur and Madame St. Quintin ; these latter, however, still continued to live in Hans Place although in a different house. Mary went much into society with her

kind friends, and greatly enjoyed frequent visits to the theatre.

She writes on June 4th to her mother: "I had not time to tell you [yesterday] how very much I was gratified at the Opera House on Friday evening. I dined at the St. Quintins', and we proceeded to take possession of our very excellent situation, a pit-box near the stage. The house was crammed to suffocation. Young is an admirable actor; I greatly prefer him to Kemble, whom I had before seen in the same character (Zanga in *The Revenge*). . . . Billington, Braham, Bianchi, Noldi, Bellamy and Siboni sang after the play, and the amateurs were highly gratified. But my delight was yet to come. The dancing of Vestris is indeed perfection. The 'poetry of motion' is exemplified in every movement, and his Apollo-like form excels any idea I had ever formed of manly grace."

This grand performance, it seems, was for Kelly's benefit. Kelly was a popular singer of his day, and was also a composer of music. He happened in addition to be a wine merchant, and Sheridan called him "a composer of wine and importer of music."

Besides visits to the Opera House and theatres Mary describes expeditions to the Royal Academy, then at Somerset House, to

the Exhibition of Water Colours in Spring Gardens, and to the Panorama, where she saw "a most admirable representation of Grand Cairo, taken from drawings by Lord Valentia." She also gives full particulars of a grand ball given in a mansion where five splendid rooms opened into each other; and there were upwards of three hundred people. "The chalked floors and Grecian lamps," she says, "gave it the appearance of a fairy scene, which was still further heightened by the beautiful exotics which almost lined these superb apartments."

It is curious to note that in those days Bedlam was looked upon as one of the sights of London, to which both foreigners and provincial visitors were taken as a matter of course. In her last letter from town Mary says: "To-morrow we go first to Bedlam, then to St. James's Street to see the Court people, and then I think I shall have had more than enough of sights and dissipation."

CHAPTER XVI

A CHOSEN CORRESPONDENT

AMONG the many names of well-known people that occur in Miss Mitford's letters of this period is that of Cobbett, to whom she had addressed one of her early odes. He was an intimate friend of her father's, and we are told that some of his letters to the Doctor "are written enigmatically and evidently with a view to secrecy, whilst others, on the contrary, express his sentiments as openly as did the 'Porcupine.'" In these latter the violent denunciations of the King and the Government, and indeed of all persons in authority, comically recall to the mind of the reader the admirable skit upon Cobbett in the *Rejected Addresses*. His letters to the Doctor usually conclude with the words, "God bless you, and d—— the ministers!"

Miss Mitford describes Cobbett as "a tall, stout man, fair and sunburnt, with a bright smile and an air compounded of the soldier and the farmer, to which his habit of wearing an eternal red waistcoat contributed not a little."

Mary's attitude towards politics throughout her life was naturally influenced by her surroundings; but her admiration for Cobbett was caused specially by his love of animals and love of rural scenery, in which she so warmly sympathised.

After a while an estrangement arose between the two families through some misunderstanding, but Mary continued to admire Cobbett's stirling qualities. Writing of him some years later she remarks :. " He was a sad tyrant, as my friends the democrats sometimes are. Servants and labourers fled before him. And yet with all his faults he was a man one could not help liking. . . . The coarseness and violence of his political writings and conversations almost entirely disappeared in his family circle, and were replaced by a kindness, a good humour and an enjoyment in seeing and promoting the happiness of others. . . . He was always what Johnson would have called 'a very pretty hater'; but since his release from Newgate he has been hatred itself. . . . [May] milder thoughts attend him," she adds : " he has my good wishes and so have his family."

Another political name occurring in Miss Mitford's correspondence is that of Sir Francis Burdett, the well-known leader of reform and exposer of abuses. Mary writes on March 28th,

1810: "If the House of Commons send Sir Francis to the Tower I should not much like anyone that I loved to be a party in it, for the populace will not tamely submit to have their idol torn from them, and especially for defending the rights and liberties of the subject. As to Sir Francis himself, I don't think either he or Cobbett would much mind it. They would proclaim themselves martyrs in the cause of liberty, and the 'Register' would sell better than ever."

It was in the spring of this same year when visiting London that Mary was first introduced to Sir William Elford, a friend of her father's, although totally opposed to him in politics. Sir William belonged to an old Devonshire family, and was Recorder for Plymouth, which borough he had represented in Parliament for many years. He was, moreover, a man of cultivated tastes and of much refinement. His interest in Miss Mitford seems to have commenced from the perusal of some of her early verses shown to him by her father.

Describing their first acquaintance in later years to a friend, Mary said: "Sir William had taken a fancy to me, and I became his child-correspondent. Few things contribute more to that indirect after-education, which is worth all the formal lessons of the schoolroom a thou-

sand times told, than such good-humoured condescension from a clever man of the world to a girl almost young enough to be his granddaughter. I owe much to that correspondence. . . . Sir William's own letters were most charming—full of old-fashioned courtesy, of quaint humour, and of pleasant and genial criticism on literature and on art."[1]

Sometimes he would send Mary a few verses he had written upon some congenial subject. Amongst these occur the following lines, composed after witnessing a performance of Mrs. Siddons in the Plymouth theatre :—

> " Her looks, her voice, her features so agree,
> Uniting all in such fine harmony,
> That from her *voice* the blind her looks declare,
> And in her sparkling *eyes* the deaf may hear."

In one of his early letters to Mary he remarks : " Pray never refrain from writing much because you want time and inclination to read over what you have written. I would a thousand times rather see what falls from your pen naturally and spontaneously than the most polished and beautiful composition that ever went to the press, and so would you I doubt not from your correspondents. . . . Pope's maxim (if it is his) that ' easy writing is not

[1] See *Yesterdays with Authors*, by James T. Fields.

easily written' is certainly true with respect to what is intended for the world . . . but is utterly false as applied to familiar writing, of which his own letters—pretended to be warm from the brain, but in reality polished and revised on publication—are a striking proof. Write away then, my dear, as fast as you can drive your quill, and abuse Miss Seward as much as you please."

These words call to mind the same kind of advice given by the good "Daddy" Crisp about forty years earlier to the young Fanny Burney: "Let this declaration serve once for all, that there is no fault in an epistolary correspondence like stiffness and study. Dash away whatever comes uppermost; the sudden sallies of imagination clap'd down on paper, just as they arise, are worth folios, and have all the warmth and merit of that sort of nonsense that is eloquent in love."

Crisp had greater powers as a critic than Sir William Elford, but Sir William had qualities that specially suited the case in question. He supplied a channel through which Mary could express and think out her views on all kinds of topics, always secure of a kind and friendly listener, and one whose judgment she valued. Being an only child and with few intimate female friends, this was a great boon, and we

owe to their correspondence a fuller knowledge of Mary's mind in its development from youth to womanhood than we could have obtained by any other means.

The allusion to Miss Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield," by Sir William refers to the following passage in one of Mary's letters: "Have you seen Miss Seward's Letters? The names of her correspondents are tempting, but alas! though addressed to all the eminent literati of the last half-century, all the epistles bear the signature of Anna Seward. . . . Did she not owe some of her fame, think you, to writing printed books at a time when it was quite as much as most women could do to read them? . . . I was always a little shocked at the sort of reputation she bore in poetry. Sometimes affected, sometimes *fade*, sometimes pedantic and sometimes tinselly, none of her works were ever simple, graceful, or natural. Her letters . . . are affected, sentimental and lackadaisical to the highest degree. Who can read a page of Miss Seward's writings on any subject without finding her out at once [as] the pedantic coquette and cold-hearted sensibility monger?"

"Anna Seward," continues Miss Mitford, "sees nothing to admire in Cowper's letters—in letters (the playful ones of course I mean) which would have immortalized him had the

Task never been written, and which (much as I admire the playful wit of the two illustrious namesakes Lady M. W. and Mrs. Montagu) are in my opinion the only perfect specimens of epistolary composition in the English language. . . . They have to me, at least, all the properties of grace ; a charm now here, now there ; a witchery rather felt in its effect than perceived in its cause."

"The attraction of Horace Walpole's letters," she adds, "is very different, though almost equally strong. The charm which lurks in them is one for which we have no term, and our Gallic neighbours seem to have engrossed both the word and the quality. *Elles sont piquantes* to the highest degree. If you read but a sentence you feel yourself spellbound till you have read the volume."

On another occasion Mary discusses the merits of Pope. She holds the same opinion as that of Sir William respecting his letters "which," as she says, "affect to be unaffected and work so hard to seem quite at their ease." "Pope is," she remarks, "even in his poetry, of a lower flight and a weaker grasp than his predecessor [Dryden]. . . . *They* must be born without an ear who can prefer the melodious monotony of Pope to the stateliness, the ease, the infinite variety of Dryden. I should as soon

think of preferring the tinkling guitar to the full-toned organ!

". . . In short, Pope is in the fullest sense of the word a mannerist. When you have said 'The Dunciad,' 'The Eloise' and 'The Rape of the Lock' you can say nothing more but 'The Rape of the Lock,' 'The Dunciad' and 'The Eloise.' I have some notion," she adds, "that you are of a different opinion, and I am very glad of it; I love to make you quarrel with me. Nothing is so tiresome as acquiescence; I would at any time give a dozen civil Yes's for one spirited No, especially in correspondence, which is exactly like a game of shuttle-cock, and would be at an end in an instant if both battledores struck the same way."

In another letter, writing of her special favourites amongst Shakespeare's plays, she remarks: "And last, not least, *Much Ado About Nothing*. The Beatrice of this play is indeed my standard of female wit and almost of female character; nothing so lively, so clever, so unaffected and so warm-hearted ever trod this workaday world. Benedick is not quite equal to her; but this, in female eyes, is no great sin. Shakespeare saw through nature, and knew which sex to make the cleverest. There's a challenge for you! Will you take up the glove?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE MARCH OF MIND

In the month of June, 1814, that memorable period in our history, Mary Mitford was again visiting her friends the St. Quintins in Hans Place.

London was then swarming with crowned heads, victorious generals and distinguished foreigners of all kinds, to rejoice with us upon the downfall of Napoleon.

Even the ultra-Whigs, to which Mary and her family belonged, had long ceased to entertain any hopes of him as a benefactor to the human race, and she had declared to Sir William Elford in 1812 that she "was no well-wisher to Napoleon—the greatest enemy to democracy that ever existed."

On the 18th June Mary and her friends went to the office of the *Morning Chronicle* (Mr. Perry, the editor, being an intimate friend of the Mitfords) to behold the grand procession of royal personages to the Merchant Taylors Hall. Writing on the following day to her mother, she

says : " The *Chronicle* will tell you much more of the procession than I can . . . suffice it to say that we got there well and pleasantly, and saw them all most clearly ; that the Emperor and Duchess are much alike—she a pretty woman, he a fine-looking man—both with fair complexions and round *Tartar* faces—no expression of any sort except affability and good-humour ; that the King of Prussia is a much more interesting and intelligent-looking man, though not so handsome ; and that the Regent got notably hissed, in spite of his protecting presence." And writing a few days later she says :

" Yesterday I went, as you know, to the play with papa, and on our road thither had a very great pleasure in meeting Lord Wellington, just arrived in London, and driving to his own house in an open carriage and six. We had an excellent sight of him, so excellent that I should know him again anywhere ; and it was quite refreshing after all those parading foreigners, emperors, and so forth to see an honest English hero, with a famous Mitford nose, looking quite happy, without any affectation of bowing or seeming affable. He is a very fine countenanced man, tanned and weather-beaten, with good dark eyes. . . . Very few of the populace knew him, but the intelligence spread like wildfire,

and Piccadilly looked like a hive of bees in swarming time."

Writing to Sir William Elford in July, 1815, Mary apologises for not having sent him, as she had proposed to do, a facsimile copy of *Louis le Desiré's* letter to Lady Charles Aynsley. "As kings of France are come in fashion again," she remarks, "I hastened to repair my omission by copying as well as I was able the aforesaid epistle. . . . I heard a great deal respecting that very good but weak and bigoted man from a French lady, Madame de Gourbillon, who was one of the favourite attendants of his late wife. His memory exceeds even that of our own venerable king. If you mention the slightest, the least remarkable fact in natural history, in the belles-lettres, in history, or anything he will say, 'Ay, Buffon, or La Harpe, or Vertot speaks of it (quoting the very words) in such a volume, such a chapter, such a page and such a line.' He is always correct, even to a monosyllable!"

This recalls to one's mind the old aphorism applied to the Bourbons: "They forgot nothing and they learnt nothing."

"Another fact," continues Mary, "which I ascertained respecting the King of France is that he is afraid of my friend *la Lectrice de la feue Reine* as ever child was of its schoolmistress, and really it is no impeachment to his courage,

for I am not at all sure that Buonaparte himself could stand against her. . . . Papa and she regularly quarrelled once a day on the old cause, ' France versus England,' varied occasionally into ' French versus English,' for she very reasonably used to attack Papa for his utter want of French, in which, I believe, he scarcely knows *oui* from *non ;* and he, with no less reason, would retort on her want of English, she having condescended to vegetate twelve years in this island of fogs and roast beef without being able at the end of that time to distinguish ' How do you do ? ' from ' Very well, I thank you ! ' "

During Miss Mitford's stay in town in the summer of 1814 she had an interesting and unlooked-for experience of which mention is made in the *Morning Chronicle* of June 25th.

The writer of the article remarks : " The friends of the British and Foreign School Society dined together yesterday at the Freemasons' Tavern. The Marquis of Lansdowne took the chair, supported by the Dukes of Kent and Sussex, the Earls of Darnley and Eardley, and several other eminent persons. The health of the Chairman and Vice-Presidents was drunk, and then that of the female members of the Society. After this a poetical tribute of Miss Mitford's was sung, and ' Thanks to Miss Mitford ' was drunk with applause."

The following lines occur in the poem :—

"The mental world was wrapt in night.

. . . . .

Oh, how the glorious dawn unfold
The brighter day that lurk'd behind ?
The march of armies may be told,
But not the march of mind."

Mary was present on the occasion, being seated, together with her friends, in the gallery of the hall. She writes to her mother : " I did not believe my ears when Lord Lansdowne, with his usual graceful eloquence, gave my health. I did not even believe it when my old friend the Duke of Kent, observing that Lord Lansdowne's voice was not always strong enough to penetrate the depths of that immense assembly, reiterated it with stentorian lungs. Still less did I believe my ears when it was drunk with 'three times three,' a flourish of drums and trumpets from the Duke of Kent's band, and the unanimous thundering and continued plaudits of five hundred people. I really thought it must be [for] Mr. Whitbread, and though I wondered how he could be 'fair and amiable' I still thought it him till his health was really drunk and he rose to make the beautiful speech of which you have only a very faint outline in the *Chronicle*." This speech was made à propos

of a toast. "The Cause of Education throughout the World," Mr. Whitbread remarking, "Miss Mitford has designated it 'The March of Mind.'"

Whilst Mary Mitford was thus growing in fame, her father, through his many speculations, was frequently involved in money difficulties. In the year 1811 it seems he was actually detained in the debtors' prison, and arrangements had to be made for the sale of the pictures at Bertram House in order to obtain money for his release. His wife, who in her warm affection was almost too forbearing, wrote to him: "I know you were disappointed in the sale of the pictures; but, my love, if we have less wealth than we hoped, we shall not have less affection; these clouds may blow over more happily than we expected."

Again she writes: "As to the cause of our present difficulties it avails not how they originated. The only question is how they can be most speedily and effectually put an end to. I ask for no details which you do not voluntarily choose to make. A forced confidence my whole soul would revolt at."

Mary writes to her father on the occasion with the same self-sacrificing love, but, it seems to us, with more judgment. She suggests that they should let Bertram House, sell books, fur-

niture, everything possible to clear their debts, and then retire to some cottage in the country or to humble lodgings in London. Then she goes on to say : " Where is the place in which, whilst we are all spared to each other, we should not be happy ? . . . Tell me if you approve my scheme, and tell me, I implore you, my most beloved father, the full extent of your embarrassments. This is no time for false delicacy on either side, I dread no evil but suspense. . . . Whatever those embarrassments may be, of one thing I am certain that the world does not contain so proud, so happy, or so fond a daughter. I would not exchange my father, even though we toiled together for our daily bread, for any man on earth, though he could pour the gold of Peru into my lap."

Miss Mitford's biographers have justly censured her father's evil courses, some considering him as altogether worthless ; but surely there must have been many redeeming qualities in one who called forth such love from such a daughter ?

For the time being the crisis described was averted ; but in 1814 Dr. Mitford was again in great difficulties, caused by his speculations in two enterprises that proved failures—one in coal, the other in a new method for lighting and heating houses, invented by the Marquis de

Chavannes, a French refugee. In this latter scheme the doctor actually invested £5000, and when the crash came he lost more money in carrying on a protracted law suit in the French courts in the vain hope of forcing the penniless nobleman to restore his lost property.

Mary, writing of her father's money losses in later life, says : " He attempted to increase his own resources by the aid of cards (he was unluckily one of the finest whist players in England) or by that other terrible gambling, which . . . even when called by its milder term of *speculation* is that terrible thing gambling still."

Early in the year 1814 Mary Mitford received a proof of the warm approval accorded to her poems in America, which gave her heartfelt pleasure.

Mrs. Mitford, writing of the event to her husband, says :—

" With your letter and the newspaper this morning arrived a small parcel for our darling, directed to Miss Mary Russell Mitford. . . . This little packet contained,—what do you think ? No less than *Narrative Poems on the Female Character in the various Relations of Life*, by Mary Russell Mitford. Printed at New York, and published by Eastburn, Kirk & Co., No. 86 Broadway. The volume is a small pocket size, well printed and elegantly

bound, and the following is a copy of the letter which accompanied it across the Atlantic :—

NEW YORK,
October 23, 1813.

MADAM,

We have the honour of transmitting to you a copy of our second edition of your admirable *Narrative Poems on the Female Character*. All who have hearts to feel and understandings to discriminate must earnestly wish you health and leisure to complete your plan.

We shall be gratified by a line acknowledging the receipt of the copy through the medium of our friends Messrs. Longman & Co. . . .

We have the honour to be, madam,

Your most obedient servants,
EASTBURN, KIRK & Co.

Mary writes to her father on the receipt of the parcel : " You will easily imagine that I was flattered and pleased with my American packet ; but even you can scarcely imagine how much. I never was so vain of anything in my whole life. Only think of their having printed two editions (for the words ' second edition ' are underscored in their letter) before last October ! "

The recognition which she received in America

so early in her career was never forgotten, and she used to say in after life, " It takes ten years to make a literary reputation in England, but America is wiser and bolder and dares to say at once, ' This is fine.' "

CHAPTER XVIII

VERSATILITY AND PLAYFULNESS

In a letter to Sir William Elford dated January, 1812, Mary remarks: "I have lived so little with girls of my own age, and have been so much accustomed to think papa my pleasantest companion and mamma my best friend that . . . I have escaped unscathed from all the charming folly and delectable romance of female intimacy and female confidence." Then going on to speak of the usual school training of girls at that period she remarks: "I must observe that in this educating age everything is taught to women except that which is perhaps worth all the rest—the power and the habit of thinking. Do not misunderstand me. . . . I would only wish that while everything is invented and inculcated that can serve to amuse, to occupy, or adorn youth—youth which needs so little amusement or ornament!—something should be instilled that may add pleasure and respectability to age."

About this time Sir William paid a visit to

Bath. Mary writes: "What says Bath of *Rokeby?* But Bath, I suppose, is, as to literature, politics and fashion, the echo of London. Be that as it may, I am very happy that you have arrived there, both because it brings us a step nearer, and because it so comfortably rids you of the horrors of solitude. *'O, la Solitude est une belle chose; mais il faut avoir quelqu'une à qui l'on puisse dire, La Solitude est une belle chose!'* . . . I most sincerely hope that we shall meet this spring in London . . . and that we shall have the pleasure of renewing (I might almost say commencing) our personal acquaintance. You will find just the same plain, awkward, blushing thing whom you profess to remember. . . . I talk to you with wonderful boldness upon paper, and while we are seventy miles distant; but I doubt whether I shall say three sentences to you when we meet, because the ghosts of all my impertinent letters will stare me in the face the moment I see you."

A little later on Sir William paid a visit to the Mitfords at Bertram House, and Mary writes of him: "He is the kindest, cleverest, warmest-hearted man in the world." Some of her friends fancied that, in spite of the great discrepancy in their ages, her partiality might possibly lead to a union between the friends. To their surmise Mary answers: "I shall not

marry Sir William Elford, for which there is a remarkably good reason, the aforesaid Sir William having no sort of desire to marry me. . . . He has an outrageous fancy for my letters, and marrying a favourite correspondent would be something like killing the goose with the golden egg."

In one of Sir William's letters he had complained of Miss Mitford's writing being somewhat illegible, to which she responds : " So, my dear friend, you cannot make out my writing ! And my honoured father cannot help you ! Really this is too affronting ! The two persons in all the world who have had the most of my letters cannot read them ! Well, there is the secret of your liking them so much. Obscurity is sometimes a great charm. You just make out my meaning and fill it up by the force of your own imagination. The outline is mine, the colouring your own. So much the better for me."

Writing on a hot summer's day, she says : " I have been solacing myself for this week past ' taking mine ease ' in a hay-cock left solely for my accommodation, where Mossy and I repair every morning to perform between us the operation of reading a *good book*, I turning the leaves and *he* going to sleep over it. It is . . . the most delightful hay-cock in the world, in a snug

little nook ; nothing visible but lawn and plantation ; whilst breathing the odours of the firs,

BERTRAM HOUSE

whose fragrance this wet summer has been past anything I could have conceived."

Mossy was the name of her dog. Throughout her life Mary Mitford was much attached to

dogs, and she was generally accompanied in her rambles by some special favourite. Sometimes it was a beautiful greyhound—one of her father's coursers that had been given to her.

She concludes one of her letters by remarking : " I have nothing more to tell you, except that I have taken a new pet—the most sagacious donkey that ever lived. She lets nobody ride her—follows me everywhere, even indoors when she can—and is really a wonderful animal. Her favourite caress is to have her ears stroked. Shakespeare has noticed this in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* when Titania tells Bottom that she will give him musk-roses and 'stroke thy fair, large ears, my gentle joy.' "

In this same letter Mary speaks of some of the singers she had heard recently in London. " I hope you like Braham's singing," she says, " though I know among your scientific musicians it is a crime of *lèse majesté* to say so ; but he is the only singer I ever heard in my life who conveyed to my very unmusical ears any idea of the expression of which music is susceptible ; no one else joins any sense to the sound. They may talk of music as 'married to immortal verse' ; but if it were not for Braham they would have been divorced long ago. . . . Moore's singing has, indeed, great feeling ; but then his singing is not much beyond a modu-

lated sigh—though the most powerful sigh in the world."

And speaking of the actors of the period, she says: "Of all that I have seen nothing has afforded me half so much delight as Miss O'Neil. She broke my heart, and charmed me beyond expression by showing me that I had a heart to break, a fact I always before rather doubted, having been till I saw her as impenetrable to tragedy as Punch and his wife or any other wooden-hearted biped. But she is irresistible. . . . The manner in which she identifies herself with the character exceeds all that I had before conceived possible of theatrical illusion. You never admire—you only weep."

In another letter she complains of Kemble's always declaiming and never speaking in a simple and natural manner. "It does appear to me," she says, "that no man can be a perfect tragedian who is not likewise a good actor in the higher branch of comedy. A statesman not at the council board, and a hero when the battle is safely ended, would, as it seems to me, talk and walk much in the same way as other people. Even a tyrant does not always rave nor a lover always whine. . . . That Shakespeare and all the writers of Elizabeth's days were of my opinion I am quite sure. Nothing is more remarkable in their delightful dramas . . . than

the sweet and natural tone of conversation which sometimes relieves the terrible intensity of their plots, like a flowery glade in a gloomy forest, or a sunbeam streaming [across] a winter sky." She goes on to say: "I cannot take leave of the drama without adding my feeble tribute of regret for the secession of Mrs. Siddons. Yet it was better that she should quit the stage in undiminished splendour than have remained to show the feeble twilight of so glorious a day."

In a letter written during a severe winter we find this description of a hoar-frost: "The scene has been lovely beyond any winter piece I ever beheld; a world formed of something much whiter than ivory—as white indeed as snow—but carved with a delicacy, a lightness, a precision to which the mossy, ungrateful, tottering snow could never pretend. Rime was the architect; every tree, every shrub, every blade of grass was clothed with its pure incrustations, but so thinly, so delicately clothed that every twig, every fibre, every ramification remained perfect, alike indeed in colour, but displaying in form to the fullest extent the endless, infinite variety of Nature. It is a scene that really defies description."

Here is a playful letter to Sir William, written in August, 1816: "Pray, my dear friend, were

you ever a bridesmaid? I rather expect you to say no, and I give you joy of your happy ignorance, for I am just now in the very agonies of the office, helping to buy and admire wedding clothes. . . . The bride is a fair neighbour of mine. . . . Her head is a perfect milliner's shop, and she plans out her wardrobe much as Phidias might have planned the Parthenon. . . . She has had no sleep since the grand question of a lace bonnet with a plume, or a lace veil without one, for the grand occasion came into discussion."

Two months later Mary writes: "I have at last safely disposed of my bride. . . . She had accumulated on her person so much finery that she looked as if by mistake she had put on two wedding dresses instead of one [and having wept copiously] was by many degrees the greatest fright I ever saw in my life. Indeed between crying and blushing brides, and bridesmaids too, do generally look strange figures. I am sure we did, though to confess the truth I really could not cry, much as I wished to keep all my neighbours in countenance, and was forced to hold my handkerchief to my eyes and sigh in vain for '*ce don de dames que Dieu ne m'a pas donné.*'"

Mary Mitford always enjoyed writing to Sir William upon literary matters, as the reader knows, and comparing their respective opinions.

"I am almost afraid to tell you," she writes, "how much I dislike *Childe Harold*. Not but there are very many fine stanzas and powerful descriptions; but the sentiment is so strange, so gloomy, so heartless, that it is impossible not to feel a mixture of pity and disgust, which all our admiration of the author's talents cannot overcome. . . . Are you not rather sick—now pray don't betray me—are you not rather sick of being one of the hundred thousand confidants of his lordship's mysterious and secret sorrows? . . . I would rather be the poorest Greek whose fate he commiserates than Lord Byron, if this poem be a true transcript of his feelings."

In one of her letters she remarks: "I prefer the French pulpit oratory to any other part of their literature. . . . I mean, of course, their old preachers—Fénelon, Bourdaloue, Massillon and Bossuet—especially the last, who approaches as nearly to the unrivalled sublimity of the sacred writings as any writer I have ever met with. Oh! what a contrast between him and our dramatic sermonists Mesdames Hawkins and Brompton! I am convinced that people read them for the story, to enjoy the stimulus of a novel without the name. . . . Ah! they had better take South and Blair and Secker for guides, and go for amusement to Miss Edge-

worth and Miss Austen. By the way, how delightful is her *Emma*, the best, I think, of all her charming works."

"Have you read *Pepys' Memoirs?*" she asks on another occasion. "I am extremely diverted with them, and prefer them to Evelyn's, all to nothing. He was too precise and too gentlemanly and too sensible by half; wrote in full dress, with an eye if not to the press, at least to posthumous reputation. Now this man sets down his thoughts in a most becoming *déshabille* —does not care twopence for posterity, and evidently thinks wisdom a very foolish thing. I don't know when any book has amused me so much. It is the very perfection of gossiping—most relishing nonsense."

Writing in 1819 she says: "Oh! but the oddest book I have met with is Madame de Genlis's new novel *Les Parvenus*, an imitation of *Gil Blas* . . . while she sticks to that she is very good; her comic powers are really exceedingly respectable—but she flies off at a tangent to her old beaten path of sentimental vice and fanatical piety, and sends her heroine to the Holy Land as a Pilgrim in the nineteenth century and then fixes her in a Spanish convent!"

Now she writes with deep admiration of Burns—"Burns the sweetest, the sublimest, the most tricksy poet who has blest this nether

world since the days of Shakespeare! I am just fresh from reading Dr. Currie's four volumes and Cromak's one, which comprise, I believe, all that he ever wrote. . . . Have you lately read Dr. Currie's work? If you have not, pray do, and tell me if you do not admire him—not with the flimsy lackadaisical praise with which certain gentle damsels bedaub his *Mountain Daisy* and his *Woodlark* . . . but with the strong and manly feeling which his fine and indignant letters, his exquisite and original humour, his inimitable pathos must awaken in such a mind as yours. Ah, what have they to answer for who let such a man perish? I think there is no poet whose works I have ever read who interests me so strongly by the display of personal character contained in almost everything he wrote (even in his songs) as Burns." After speaking of "his versatility and his exhaustless imagination," she says: "By the way, my dear Sir William, does it not appear to you that versatility is the true and rare characteristic of that rare thing called genius—versatility and playfulness?"

Writing to Sir William somewhat hurriedly in March, 1817, Mary remarks: "Rather than send the envelope blank I will fill it with the translation of a pretty allegory of M. Arnault's, the author of 'Germanicus.' You must not

read it if you have read the French, because it does not come near to its simplicity. If you have not read the French you may read the English. Be upon honour."

Translation of M. Arnault's lines on his own exile :—

"Torn rudely from thy parent bough,
Poor withered leaf, where roamest thou ?
I know not where ! A tempest broke
My only prop, the stately oak ;
And ever since in wearying change
With each capricious wind I range ;
From wood to plain, from hill to dale,
Borne sweeping on as sweeps the gale,
Without a struggle or a cry,
I go where all must go as I ;
I go where goes the self-same hour
A laurel leaf or rose's flower ! "

CHAPTER XIX

FROM MANSION TO COTTAGE

Miss Mitford owed to her friendship with Sir William Elford her first acquaintance with the artist Haydon. Describing in later years to a friend how this came about, she said: "An amateur painter himself, painting interested Sir William particularly, and he often spoke much, and warmly, of the young man from Plymouth, whose picture of the 'Judgement of Solomon' was then on exhibition in London. 'You must see it,' said he, 'even if you come to town on purpose.'

"It so happened," continued Miss Mitford, "that I merely passed through London that season . . . and I arrived at the exhibition in company with a still younger friend so near the period of closing that more punctual visitors were moving out, and the doorkeeper actually turned us and our money back. I persisted, however, assuring him that I only wanted to look at one picture, and promising not to detain him long. Whether my entreaties would have

carried the point or not I cannot tell, but half a crown did; so we stood admiringly before the 'Judgement of Solomon.' I am no great judge of painting; but that picture impressed me then, as it does now, as excellent in composition, in colour, and in that great quality of telling a story which appeals at once to every mind. Our delight was sincerely felt, and most enthusiastically expressed, as we kept gazing at the picture, and [it] seemed to give much pleasure to the only gentleman who remained in the room—a young and very distinguished-looking person, who had watched with evident amusement our negotiation with the doorkeeper. . . . I soon surmised that we were seeing the painter as well as his painting; and when two or three years afterwards a friend took me . . . to view the 'Entry into Jerusalem,' Haydon's next great picture, then near its completion, I found I had not been mistaken.

"Haydon was at that period a remarkable person to look at and listen to. . . . His figure was short, slight, elastic and vigorous; his complexion clear and healthful. . . . But how shall I attempt to tell you," she adds, "of his brilliant conversation, of his rapid energetic manner, of his quick turns of thought as he flew from topic to topic, dashing his brush here and there upon the canvas? . . . Among the studies I re-

marked that day in his apartment was one of a mother who had just lost her only child—a most masterly rendering of an unspeakable grief. A sonnet which I could not help writing on the sketch gave rise to our long correspondence, and to a friendship which never flagged."

We have spoken in a recent chapter of the Mitfords' great losses of money from time to time. These were caused in part by the protracted lawsuit carried on by Dr. Mitford against the Marquis de Chavannes. But the main cause was the doctor's unhappy habits of gambling and of speculation. He was "ever seeking," we are told, "to augment his income by some doubtful investment for which he had the tip of some unscrupulous schemer to whose class he fell an easy prey." The only remnant of the family property, once so large, which Dr. Mitford was unable to touch was a sum of £3000 left by Dr. Russell to his daughter and her offspring. This sum, placed in the funds, was happily held in trust by the Mitfords' fast friend, the Rev. William Harness, and although he was applied to from time to time by Mrs. Mitford and her daughter to hand it over to the doctor when he was pressed by creditors, Mr. Harness steadily refused to do so. Writing to Miss Mitford some years later after the death

of her mother, he says: "That £3000 I consider as the sheet-anchor of your independence . . . and *while your father lives* it shall never stir from its present post in the funds . . . *from whatever quarter the proposition may come* [to hand it over to him]. I have but one black, blank unqualified *No* for my answer. I do not doubt Dr. Mitford's integrity, but I have not the slightest confidence in his prudence; and I am fully satisfied that if these three thousand and odd hundreds of pounds were placed at his disposal *to-day* they would fly the way so many other thousands have gone before them *to-morrow*."[1]

In the spring of 1820 the family were forced to quit Bertram House, at which period we are told "the doctor must have been all but penniless," and there could have been "nothing between the father and mother and hopeless destitution but the genius and industry of the daughter." Happily her courage and her affection never failed. But she could not quit the house which had been her home for sixteen years without sorrow. "It nearly broke my heart," she writes. "What a tearing up of the roots it was! The trees and fields and sunny hedgerows, however little distinguished by pic-

[1] See *Life and Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford*, by W. J. Roberts.

turesque beauty, were to me as old friends. Women have more of this natural feeling than the stronger sex; they are creatures of home and habit, and ill brook transplanting."

CHAPTER XX

THREE MILE CROSS

THE Mitfords had taken a cottage in Three Mile Cross—a small village about two miles from Graseley, which they supposed at first would be only a temporary abode, but which finally proved to be their home for many years. Here it was that Mary Russell Mitford, throwing herself into the life of her rustic surroundings, and recognizing its poetry and its beauty, conceived her plan of writing the tales of "Our Village." These tales were destined to render little Three Mile Cross classic ground, and to attract pilgrims, even from the other side of the Atlantic, to visit the prototype of "Our Village."

Mary writes to Sir William Elford early in April, 1820 :—

"We have moved a mile nearer Reading—to a little village street situate on the turnpike road between Basingstoke and the aforesaid illustrious and quarrelsome borough. Our residence is a cottage—no not a cottage, it does not deserve the name—a messuage or tenement,

such as a little farmer who had made twelve or fourteen hundred pounds might retire to when he left off business to live on his means. It consists of a series of closets . . . which they call parlours and kitchens and pantries, some of them minus a corner which has been unnaturally filched for a chimney ; others deficient in half a side which has been truncated by the shelving roof. . . . [But] we shall be greatly benefited by the compression—though at present the squeeze sits upon us as uneasily as tight stays, and is almost as awkward looking.

" Nevertheless we are really getting very comfortable and falling into our old habits with all imaginable ease. Papa has already amused himself by committing a disorderly person, the pest of the Cross. . . . Mamma has converted an old dairy into a most commodious storehouse. I have stuffed the rooms with books and the garden with flowers, and lost my only key. Lucy has made a score of new acquaintances, and picked up a few lovers ; and the great white cat, after appearing exceedingly disconsolate and out of his wits for a day or two, has given full proof of resuming his old warlike and predatory habits by being lost all the morning in a large rat hole and stealing the milk for our tea this afternoon."

Ten days later Mary writes to a female

THE MITFORDS' COTTAGE

friend : " We are still at this cottage, which I like very much. . . . Indeed I had taken root completely till yesterday, when some neighbours of ours (pigs, madam) got into my little flower court and made havoc among my pinks and sweet-peas, and a little loosened the fibres of my affection. At the very same moment the pump was announced to be dry, which, considering how much water we consume—I and my flowers—is a sad affair." But she adds a day or two afterwards : " I am all in love with our cottage again : the cherries are ripe, and the roses bloom, the water has come, and the pigs are gone ! "

The Mitfords' cottage is still to be seen standing in the long straggling street of low cottages, divided by pretty gardens, with a wayside inn on one side, on the other side a village shop, and right opposite a cobbler's stall. No railway has come to bring bustle and noise to that quiet spot, so that the village still retains what Miss Mitford has called its " trick of standing still, of remaining stationary, unchanged and unimproved in this most changeable and improving world."

In the opening chapter of the first volume of *Our Village* the writer says :—

" Will you walk with me through our village, courteous reader ? The journey is not long.

We will begin at the lower end, and proceed up the hill.

"The tidy square red cottage[1] on the right hand with the long well-stocked garden by the side of the road belongs to a retired publican from a neighbouring town . . . one who piques himself on independence and idleness . . . and cries out for reform. He introduced into our peaceful vicinage the rebellious innovation of an illumination on the Queen's acquittal. Remonstrance and persuasion were in vain; he talked of liberty and broken windows—so we all lighted up. Oh! how he shone that night with candles and laurel and white bows and gold paper, and a transparency with a flaming portrait of Her Majesty, hatted and feathered in red ochre. He had no rival in the village that we all acknowledged; the very bonfire was less splendid. . . .

"Next to his house, though parted from it by another long garden with a yew arbour at the end, is the pretty dwelling of the shoemaker, a pale, sickly-looking, black-haired man, the very model of sober industry. There he sits in his little shop from early morning till late at night. An earthquake would hardly stir him; the illumination did not. He stuck immovably

[1] This house, though unaltered in appearance, is now an inn called "The Fox and Horn."

to his last from the first lighting up through the long blaze and the slow decay till his large solitary candle was the only light in the place. One cannot conceive anything more perfect than the contempt which the man of transparencies and the man of shoes must have felt for each other on that evening. Our shoemaker is a man of substance, he employs three journeymen, two lame and one a dwarf, so that his shop looks like a hospital. . . . He has only one pretty daughter—a light, delicate, fair-haired girl of fourteen, the champion, protectress and playfellow of every brat under three years old. . . . A very attractive person is that child-loving girl. . . .

" The first house on the opposite side of the way is the blacksmith's, a gloomy dwelling, where the sun never seems to shine, dark and smoky within and without, like a forge. The blacksmith is a high officer in our little state, nothing less than a constable ; but alas ! alas ! when tumults arise and the constable is called for he will commonly be found in the thickest of the fray. . . .

" Next to this official dwelling is a spruce little tenement, red, high and narrow, boasting, one above another, three sash windows, the only sash windows in the village. That slender mansion has a fine, genteel look. The little

parlour seems made for Hogarth's old maid and her stunted foot-boy, for tea and card parties . . . for the rustle of faded silks and the splendour of old china, for affected gentility and real starvation. This should have been its destiny, but fate has been unpropitious, it belongs to a plump, merry, bustling dame with four fat, rosy, noisy children, the very essence of vulgarity and plenty.

"Then comes the village shop, like other village shops, multifarious as a bazaar; a repository for bread, shoes, tea, cheese, tape, ribands and bacon, for everything, in short, except the one particular thing which you happen to want at the moment . . . and which 'they had yesterday and will have again tomorrow.' . . . The people are civil and thriving and frugal withal. They have let the upper part of their house to two young women . . . who teach little children their A B C, and make caps and gowns for their mammas—parcel schoolmistress, parcel mantua maker. I believe they find adorning the body a more profitable vocation than adorning the mind."

This little shop still exists, and it still bears above its modest window the identical name of Bromley, which it bore in Miss Mitford's day.

"Divided from the shop by a narrow yard," continues Miss Mitford, "and opposite the shoe-

THE VILLAGE SHOP

maker's, is a habitation of whose inmates I shall say nothing. A cottage—no—a miniature house, with many additions, little odds and ends of places, pantries, and what not; all angles and of a charming in-and-outness; a little bricked court before one half, a little flower-yard before the other; the walls old and weather-stained, covered with hollyhocks, roses, honeysuckles and a great apricot tree. The casements are full of geraniums (ah, there is our superb white cat peeping out from amongst them!), the closets . . . full of contrivances and corner cupboards; and the little garden behind full of common flowers, tulips, pinks, larkspurs, peonies, stocks and carnations, with an arbour of privet, not unlike a sentry-box, where one lives in a delicious green light, and looks out on the gayest of all gay flower-beds. That house was built on purpose to show in what an exceedingly small compass comfort may be packed. Well, I will loiter there no longer.

"The next tenement is a place of importance—the Rose Inn ['The Swan'], a whitewashed building, retired from the road behind its fine swinging sign, with a little bow-window room coming out on one side and forming with our stable on the other a sort of open square, which is the constant resort of carts, waggons and

return chaises. There are two carts there now, and mine host is serving them with beer in his eternal red waistcoat. . . . He has a stirring wife, a hopeful son and a daughter, the belle of the village, not so pretty as the fair nymph of the shoe shop, and less elegant, but ten times as fine, all curl-papers in the morning, like a porcupine, all curls in the afternoon, like a poodle, with more flowers than curl-papers and more lovers than curls. . . .

"In a line with the bow-window room is a low garden wall belonging to a house under repair; the white house opposite the collar-maker's shop, with four lime trees before it and a waggon load of bricks at the door. That house is the plaything of a wealthy, whimsical person who lives about a mile off. He has a passion for bricks and mortar. . . . Our good neighbour fancied that the limes shaded the rooms and made them dark, so he had all the leaves stripped from every tree. There they stood, poor miserable skeletons, as bare as Christmas under the glowing midsummer sun."

Here we would remark that when paying our first visit to Three Mile Cross many years ago that house was unchanged, and the row of old pollarded limes still stood as sentinels before it; but since then the house has been altered and the trees have disappeared. We would also

THE SWAN INN

mention that the real name of the inn is the "Swan," but in all her village tales Miss Mitford calls it the "Rose." The "collar-maker's shop," on the opposite side of the road, a quaint little edifice, is just as it was in appearance in the writer's day.

"Next door [to the house under repair]," continues Miss Mitford, "lives a carpenter, famed ten miles round, and worthy all his fame, with his excellent wife and their little daughter Lizzie, the plaything and queen of the village, a child of three years old, according to the register, but six in size and strength and intellect, in power and in self-will. She manages everybody in the place, her schoolmistress included . . . makes the lazy carry her, the silent talk to her, the grave romp with her; does anything she pleases; is absolutely irresistible. . . . Together with a good deal of the character of Napoleon she has something of his square, sturdy, upright form . . . she has the imperial attitudes too, and loves to stand with her hands behind her, or folded over her breast, and sometimes when she has a little touch of shyness she clasps them together on the top of her head, pressing down her shining curls, and looking so exquisitely pretty! Yes, Lizzie is the queen of the village! She has but one rival in her dominions, a certain white greyhound called

Mayflower, much her friend, who resembles her in beauty and strength, in playfulness and almost in sagacity, and reigns over the animal world as she over the human. They are both coming with me, Lizzie and Lizzie's 'pretty May.'

"We are now at the end of the street; a cross lane, a rope walk, shaded with limes and oaks, and a cool, clear pond, overhung with elms, lead us to the bottom of the hill. There is still an house round the corner, ending in a picturesque wheeler's shop. The dwelling-house is more ambitious. Look at the fine flowered window-blinds, the green door with the brass knocker. . . . These are the curate's lodgings—apartments his landlady would call them. He lives with his own family four miles off, but once or twice a week he comes to his neat little parlour to write sermons, to marry or to bury as the case may require. Never were better people than his host and hostess, and there is a reflection of clerical importance about them, since their connection with the Church, which is quite edifying—a decorum, a gravity, a solemn politeness. Oh, to see the worthy wheeler carry the gown after his lodger on a Sunday, nicely pinned up in his wife's best handkerchief; or to hear him rebuke a squalling child or a squabbling woman! The curate is nothing to him. He is fit to be perpetual churchwarden."

We would remark here that the wheeler's workshop is one of the most striking objects in the village. Its great hatch doors are always thrown wide open, revealing a dark interior in vivid contrast with the sunshine overhead. Its old thatched roof is illuminated by the golden light, as are also the spreading branches of a huge wistaria that cover its main wall as well as the whole front of the adjoining dwelling-house. The present wheelwright is the successor of the very man whom Miss Mitford has just described. It is pleasant to have a chat with him about the village, as he has known every corner of it . . . also its inhabitants for many a year. He showed us the curate's little parlour, into which the front door opens, admitting a pretty view of the " cool clear pond " on the further side of the lane with its overhanging trees.

Little Three Mile Cross does not boast a church of its own, but it is in the parish of Shinfield, and it was to Shinfield Church, distant about two miles and a half, that the curate repaired, accompanied by the " wheeler " carrying his gown.

On quitting the village Miss Mitford exclaims : " How pleasantly the road winds up the hill between its broad green borders and hedgerows, so thickly timbered ! . . . We are

now on the eminence close to the Hill-house and its beautiful garden." And looking back, she describes "the view; the road winding down the hill with a slight bend . . . a waggon slowly ascending, and a horseman passing it at full trot, [while] further down are seen the limes and the rope-walk, then the village, peeping through the trees, whose clustering tops hide all but the chimneys and various roofs of the houses . . . [and in the distance] the elegant town of B——, with its fine old church towers and spires, the whole view shut in by a range of chalky hills; and over every part of the picture trees so profusely scattered that it appears like a woodland scene, with glades and villages intermixed."

CHAPTER XXI

THE NEW HOME

Miss Mitford's cottage in Three Mile Cross is practically the same as it was in her day, the chief alterations being that the windows to the front of the house, which were formerly leaded casement windows, have been enlarged and are now sashed. Also that the window of a parlour looking unto the back garden has been enlarged. In former times, too, the red bricks of which the house is built were exposed, but they are now covered with plaster.

Curiously enough some early prints of the cottage are very misleading. A limner at a distance has evidently tried to make a pleasing drawing from some very imperfect sketch done on the spot, which did not reveal the fact that the right-hand portion of the house recedes, and that the front door is not in the middle but on one side. Thus a report arose that the cottage had been rebuilt in later years. But happily we possess conclusive evidence to the contrary given by a gentleman still living who passed his

childhood in the cottage almost as an adopted son of the household. When visiting the place a few years ago he declared that the cottage was unchanged, and recalled, as he passed from room to room, his happy associations with each spot.

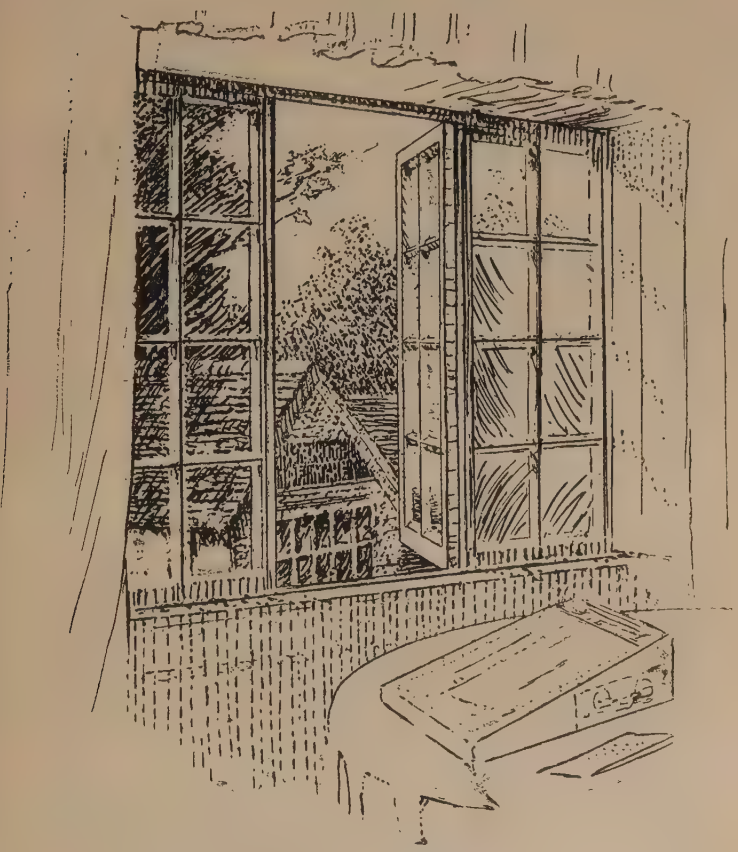
The house is now used as a working man's club, and the caretaker is ready to show the place to any visitors desirous to see the home of Miss Mitford.

Behind the house on part of the site of Miss Mitford's garden there is a large edifice built called the "Mitford Hall," which is used as an Institute for the working classes, and is a source of much good to the neighbourhood. But happily it stands well back and cannot be seen by the visitor who gazes at the cottage from the village street, and who is glad to dwell only on what is connected with Miss Mitford's residence in the place.

In the sketch of the cottage given the reader will observe that the windows have been drawn as they were formerly and a few other small alterations made.

The cottage consists of a ground floor with one storey only above it. The casement window in the receding portion of the cottage, just below the shelving roof, belongs to Miss Mitford's study, a quaint little room where at a small

table she used to write her stories of village life. The window looks down upon the "shoe-



THE WRITING PARLOUR

maker's" little shop, with its pointed roof and tiny window panes. It must be quite unchanged

in appearance since Miss Mitford described it, the sole alteration being in the business carried on there, as it and the collar-maker's quaint shop at the top of the village have exchanged trades.

As she sat at that window Miss Mitford would jot down all the incidents that occurred in the village street below. "It is a pleasant, lively scene this May morning," she writes, "with the sun shining so gaily on the irregular rustic dwellings, intermixed with their pretty gardens; a cart and a waggon watering (it would be more correct perhaps to say *beering*) at the 'Rose'; Dame Wheeler with her basket and her brown loaf just coming from the bakehouse; the nymph of the shoe shop feeding a large family of goslings at the open door; two or three women in high gossip dawdling up the street; Charles North the gardener, with his blue apron and a ladder on his shoulder, walking rapidly by; a cow and a donkey browsing the grass by the wayside; my white greyhound, Mayflower, sitting majestically in front of her own stable; and ducks, chickens, pigs and children scattered over all. . . . Ah! here is the post cart coming up the road at its most respectable rumble, that cart, or rather caravan, which so much resembles a house upon wheels, or a show of the smaller kind at a country fair. It is now crammed full

of passengers, the driver just protruding his head and hands out of the vehicle, and the sharp, clever boy, who, in the occasional absence of his father, officiates as deputy, perched like a monkey on the roof."

"I have got exceedingly fond of this little place," writes Mary to Sir William Elford; "could be content to live and die here. To be sure the rooms are of the smallest; I, in our little parlour, look something like a blackbird in a goldfinch's cage—but it is so snug and comfortable."

The projecting piece of building seen in the sketch in the front of the cottage was appropriated by the doctor as his dispensary. It has a door that opens into the little front court. The bedrooms are on the first floor.

Mary's study window commands a pretty view beyond the low peaked roofs of the shoemaker's shop and of its neighbouring cottages. At the foot of a grassy slope can be seen a dark line of tree tops. They form part of a magnificent avenue of elms that border a long stretch of grass—one of the old drover's roads—extending for nearly two miles. "The effect of these tall solemn trees," remarks Mary, "so equal in height, so unbroken and so continuous, is quite grand and imposing as twilight comes on, especially when some slight bend in the lane

gives to the outline almost the look of an amphitheatre." This spot—Woodcock Lane as it is called—was a favourite resort of Mary's, and thither she often repaired when composing her country sketches.

"In that very lane," she writes one day, "am I writing on this sultry June day, luxuriating in the shade, the verdure, the fragrance of hayfield and beanfield, and the absence of all noise except the song of birds and that strange mingling of many sounds, the whir of a thousand forms of insect life, so often heard among the general hush of a summer noon.

". . . Here comes a procession of cows going to milking, with an old attendant, still called the cow-boy, who, although they have seen me often enough, one should think, sitting beneath a tree writing . . . with my dog Fanchon nestled at my feet—still *will* start as if they had never seen a woman before in their lives. Back they start, and then they rush forward, and then the old drover emits certain sounds so horribly discordant that little Fanchon starts up in a fright on her feet, deranging all the economy of my extemporary desk and wellnigh upsetting the inkstand. Very much frightened is my pretty pet, the arrantest coward that ever walked upon four legs! And so she avenges herself, as cowards are wont to do, by following

THE WHEELWRIGHT'S SHOP

the cows at a safe distance as soon as they are fairly passed, and beginning to bark amain when they are nearly out of sight."

Mary delighted in the beauty of the country that surrounds Three Mile Cross even from the first moment of her arrival, but her delight increased as she became more intimately acquainted with its charms.

"This country is eminently flowery," she writes. "Besides the variously tinted primroses and violets in singular profusion we have all sorts of orchises and arums; the delicate wood anemones; the still more delicate wood sorrel, with its lovely purple veins meandering over the white drooping flower; the field tulips [or fritillary] with its rich checker-work of lilac and crimson, and the sun shining through the leaves as through old painted glass; the ghostly field star of Bethlehem [and] the wild lilies-of-the-valley. . . . Yes, this is really a country of flowers!"

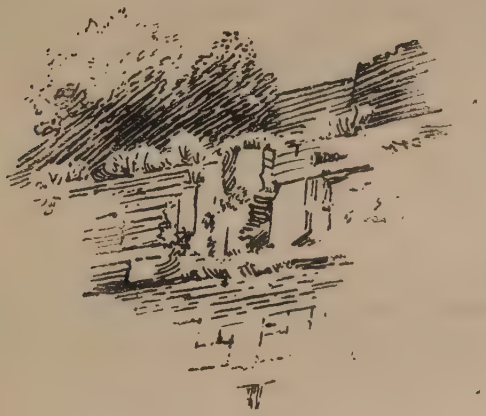
She revelled, too, in the wilder beauty of the great commons in the neighbourhood "always picturesque and romantic," she writes one day in early summer, "and now peculiarly brilliant, and glowing with the luxuriant orange flowers of the furze . . . stretching around us like a sea of gold, and loading the very air with its rich almond odour."

She loved the winding rivers that water her part of the country; the "pleasant and pastoral Kennet for silver eels renowned," upon whose bordering meadows the fritillary, both purple and white, grow in profusion; and the changeful, beautiful Loddon "rising sometimes level with its banks, so clear and smooth and peaceful . . . and sometimes like a frisky, tricksy watersprite much addicted to wandering out of bounds."

There is a fine old stone bridge that crosses the Loddon about a mile beyond Shinfield, with a small inn, "The George," close by, a favourite resort of fishermen. Standing on that bridge one summer evening Miss Mitford watched the setting sun descend over the water.

"What a sunset! How golden! how beautiful!" she exclaims. "The sun just disappearing, and the narrow liny clouds, which a few minutes ago lay like soft vapoury streaks along the horizon, lighted up with a golden splendour that the eye can scarcely endure. . . . Another minute and the brilliant orb totally disappears, and the sky above grows every moment more varied and more beautiful as the dazzling golden lines are mixed with glowing red and gorgeous purple, dappled with small dark specks and mingled with such a blue as the egg of the hedge-sparrow. To look up at

that glorious sky, and then to see that magnificent picture reflected in the clear and lovely Loddon water is a pleasure never to be described and never forgotten. My heart swells and my eyes fill as I write of it and think of the immeasurable majesty of nature and the unspeakable goodness of God who has spread an enjoyment so pure, so peaceful and so intense before the meanest and the lowest of His creatures."



CHAPTER XXII

A LOQUACIOUS VISITOR

THERE is an amusing sketch in the first volume of *Our Village* entitled "The Talking Lady," from which we should like to quote a few passages. Its scene is evidently laid in the Mitfords' common sitting-room, whose two windows look both front and back, and in which we have sat many a time.

After alluding to a play written by Ben Jonson called *The Silent Woman* Miss Mitford remarks :—

"If the learned dramatist had happened to fall in with such a specimen of female loquacity as I have just parted with, he might perhaps have given us a pendant to his picture in the *Talking Lady*. Pity but he had! He would have done her justice, which I could not at any time, least of all now. I am too much stunned; too much like one escaped from a belfry on a coronation day. I am just resting from the fatigue of four days' hard listening—four snowy, sleety, rainy days, all of them too bad to admit

the possibility that any petticoated thing, were she as hardy as a Scotch fir, should stir out; four days chained by 'sad civility' to that fireside once so quiet, and again—cheering thought! —again I trust to be so, when the echo of that visitor's incessant tongue shall have died away.

"The visitor in question is a very excellent and respectable elderly lady, upright in mind and body, with a figure that does honour to her dancing master, and a face exceedingly well preserved. . . . She took us in the way from London to the West of England, and being, as she wrote, 'not quite well, not equal to much company, prayed that no other guest might be admitted so that she might have the pleasure of our conversation all to herself' (*Ours!* as if it were possible for any of us to slide in a word edgewise!) 'and especially enjoy the gratification of talking over old times with the master of the house, her countryman.' Such was the promise of her letter, and to the letter it has been kept. All the news and scandal of a large county forty years ago . . . and ever since has she detailed with a minuteness . . . which would excite the envy of a county historian, a king-at-arms, or even a Scotch novelist. Her knowledge is astonishing. . . . It should seem to listen to her as if at some time of her life she

ust have listened herself ; and yet her countryman declares . . . no such event has occurred.

" . . . Talking, sheer talking, is meat and drink and sleep to her. She likes nothing else. Eating is a sad interruption. . . . Walking exhausts the breath that might be better employed. . . . Allude to some anecdote of the neighbourhood, and she forthwith treats you with as many parallel passages as are to be found in an air with variations. . . . The very weather is not a safe subject. Her memory is a perpetual register of hard frosts and long droughts and high winds and terrible storms, with all the evils that followed in their train and all the personal events connected with them. . . . By this time it rains, and she sits down to a pathetic see-saw of conjectures on the chance of Mrs. Smith's having set out for her daily walk, or the possibility that Dr. Brown may have ventured to visit his patients in his gig, and the certainty that Lady Green's new housemaid would come from London on the outside of the coach.

" With all this intolerable prosing she is actually reckoned a pleasant woman ! Her acquaintance in the great manufacturing town where she usually resides is very large. . . . Doubtless her associates deserve the old French compliment, '*Ils ont tous un grand talent pour le silence.*' . . . It is the *tête-à-tête* that kills, or

WHERE THE CURATE LODGED

the small fireside circle of three or four where only one can speak and all the rest must seem to listen—*seem!* did I say?—must listen in good earnest. . . . She has the eye of a hawk, and detects a wandering glance, an incipient yawn, the slightest movement of impatience. The very needle must be quiet. . . . I wonder if she had married how many husbands she would have talked to death. . . . Since the decease of her last nephew she attempted to form an establishment with a widow lady for the sake, as they both said, of the comfort of society. But—strange miscalculation! she was a talker too! They parted in a week.

. . . "And we have also parted. I am just returned from escorting her to the coach, which is to convey her two hundred miles westward; and I have still the murmur of her adieux resounding in my ears like the indistinct hum of the air on a frosty night. It was curious to see how almost simultaneously these mournful adieux shaded into cheerful salutations of her new comrades, the passengers in the mail. Poor souls! Little does the civil young lad who made way for her or the fat lady, his mamma, who with pains and inconvenience made room for her, or the grumpy gentleman in the opposite corner who, after some dispute, was at length won to admit her dressing-box—little do they

suspect what is to befall them. Two hundred miles! And she never sleeps in a carriage! Well, patience be with them . . . and to her all happiness."

In one of her stories entitled "Whitsun Eve," Mary Mitford describes her own garden and its picturesque surroundings.

"The pride of my heart," she writes, "and the delight of my eyes is my garden. Our house, which is in dimensions very much like a bird-cage, and might with almost equal convenience be laid on a shelf, or hung up in a tree, would be utterly unbearable in warm weather were it not that we have a retreat out of doors—and a very pleasant retreat it is. . . .

"Fancy a small plot of ground with a pretty, low, irregular cottage at one end; a large granary, divided from the dwelling by a little court running along one side, and a long thatched shed, open towards the garden, and supported by wooden pillars on the other. The bottom is bounded, half by an old wall and half by an old paling, over which we see a pretty distance of woody hills. The house, granary, wall and palings are covered with vines, cherry trees, roses, honeysuckles and jessamines, with great clusters of tall hollyhocks running up between them. . . . This is my garden; and the long pillared shed, the sort of rustic arcade, which runs along

IN THE CURATE'S PARLOUR

one side, parted from the flower-beds by a row of rich geraniums, is our out-of-door drawing-room.

" I know nothing so pleasant as to sit there on a summer afternoon, with the western sun flickering through a great elder tree, and lighting up one gay parterre, where flowers and flowering shrubs are set as thick as grass in a field . . . where we may guess that there is such a thing as mould but never see it. I know nothing so pleasant as to sit in the shade of that dark bower . . . now catching a glimpse of the little birds as they fly rapidly in and out of their nests . . . now tracing the gay gambles of the common butterflies as they sport around the dahlias ; now watching that rarer moth which the country people, fertile in pretty names, call the bee-bird. . . .

" What a contrast from the quiet garden to the lively street ! Saturday night is always a time of stir and bustle in our village, and this is Whitsun Eve, the pleasantest Saturday of all the year, when London journeymen and servant lads and lasses snatch a short holiday to visit their families. . . . This village of ours is swarming to-night like a hive of bees. . . . I must try to give some notion of the various figures.

" First there is a group suited to Teniers, a

cluster of out-of-door customers of the 'Rose,' old benchers of the inn, who sit round a table smoking and drinking in high solemnity to the sound of Timothy's fiddle. Next a mass of eager boys, the combatants of Monday, who are surrounding the shoemaker's shop where an invisible hole in their [cricket] ball is mending by Master Kemp himself. . . . Farther down the street is the pretty black-eyed girl, Sally Wheeler, come home for a day's holiday from B——, escorted by a tall footman in a dashing livery, whom she is trying to curtsy off before her deaf grandmother sees him. I wonder whether she will succeed ? "

In another early sketch of *Our Village* called "Dr. Tubb," Mary Mitford writes :—

"On taking possession of our present abode about four years ago we found our garden and all the gardens of the straggling village street in which it is situated filled, peopled, infested by a beautiful flower which grew in such profusion and was so difficult to keep under that (poor pretty thing !) instead of being admired and cherished . . . it was cut down, pulled up and hoed out like a weed. I do not know the name of this elegant plant, nor have I met with anyone who does ; we call it the Spicer, after an old naval officer who once inhabited the white house just above, and, according to tra-

dition, first brought the seed from foreign parts. . . .

I never saw anything prettier than a whole bed of these spicers which had clothed the top of a large heap of earth belonging to our little mason by the roadside ; [they] grew as thick and close as grass in a meadow, covered with delicate red and white blossoms like a fairy orchard."

It seems to us that this flower may have been the American Balsam, which grows as rapidly as any weed, and which we happened actually to see, waving its pretty red and white blossoms in Miss Mitford's garden some years ago. This was long after her death, and when the cottage and garden had fallen into humbler hands.

" I never passed the spicers," remarks Mary, " without stopping to look at them, and I was one day half shocked to see a man, his pockets stuffed with the plants, two large bundles under each arm, and still tugging away root and branch. . . . This devastation did not, however, proceed from disrespect, the spicer gatherer being engaged in sniffing with visible satisfaction the leaves and stalks. ' It has a fine venomous smell,' quoth he in soliloquy, ' and will certainly when stilled be good for something or other.' This was my first sight of Dr. Tubb . . . a quack of the highest and most extended repu-

tation, inventor and compounder of medicines, bleeder, shaver and physicker of man and beast. . . .

"We have frequently met since, and are now well acquainted, although the worthy experimentalist considers me as a rival practitioner, an interloper, and hates me accordingly. He has very little cause, [for] my quackery, being mostly of the cautious, preventive, safeguard, commonsense order, stands no chance against the boldness and decision of his all-promising ignorance. He says, Do! I say, Do not! He deals in *stimuli*, I in sedatives; I give medicine, he gives cordial waters. Alack! alack! when could a dose of rhubarb, even although reinforced by a dole of good broth, compete with a draught of peppermint and a licensed dram? No! no! Dr. Tubb has no cause to fear my practice."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PUBLICATION OF *OUR VILLAGE*

Miss Mitford writes to Sir William Elford on March 5th, 1824: "In spite of your prognostics, I think you will like *Our Village*. It will be out in three weeks or a month. . . . It is exceedingly playful and lively, and I think you will like it. Charles Lamb (the matchless 'Elia' of the *London Magazine*) says that nothing so fresh and characteristic has appeared for a long while. It is not over modest to say this; but who would not be proud of the praise of such a *proser?*"

Sir William Elford, in answering this letter, expressed his opinion that the sketches of rural life would have been better if written in the form of letters.

"Your notion of letters pleases me much," replies Miss Mitford, "as I see plainly that it is the result of the old prepossessions and partialities which do me so much honour and give me so much pleasure. But it would never have done. The sketches are too long, and necessarily too

much connected for *real* correspondence. . . . Besides, we are free and easy in these days, and talk to the public as a friend. Read *Elia*, or the *Sketch Book*, or Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, or any popular book of the new school and you will find that we have turned over the Johnsonian periods and the Blair-ian formality, to keep company with the wigs and hoops, the stiff curtsys and low bows of our ancestors. Now the public—the reading public—is, as I said before, the correspondent and confidant of everybody.

"Having thus made the best defence I can against your criticism, I proceed to answer your question, 'Are the characters and descriptions true?' Yes! yes! yes! As true as is well possible. You, as a great landscape painter, know that in painting a favourite scene you do a little embellish, and can't help it; you avail yourself of happy accidents of atmosphere, and if anything be ugly you strike it out, or if anything be wanting you put it in. But still the picture is a likeness; and that this is a very faithful one you will judge when I tell you that a worthy neighbour of ours, a post-captain, who has been in every quarter of the globe and is equally distinguished for the sharp look-out and the *bonhomie* of his profession, accused me most seriously of carelessness in putting 'The

Rose' for 'The Swan' as the sign of our next-door neighbour, and was no less disconcerted at the *misprint* (as he called it) of B. for R. in the name of our next town. *A cela près* he declares the picture to be exact."

Miss Mitford thus prefaces her work in the first sketch entitled *Our Village* :—

"Of all situations for a constant residence that which appears to me most delightful is a little village far in the country ; a small neighbourhood, not of fine mansions finely peopled, but of cottages and cottage-like houses . . . with inhabitants whose faces are as familiar to us as the flowers in our garden ; a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an anthill or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold. . . . [Where we] learn to know and to love the people about us, with all their peculiarities, just as we learn to know and to love the nooks and turns of the shady lanes and sunny commons that we pass every day.

"Even in books I like a confined locality, and so do the critics when they talk of the unities. Nothing is so tiresome as to be whirled half over Europe at the chariot wheels of a hero, to go to sleep at Vienna and awaken at Madrid ; it produces a real fatigue, a weariness of spirit. On the other hand nothing is so delightful as to sit down in a country village in one of Miss

Austen's delicious novels, quite sure before we leave it to become intimate with every spot and every person it contains; or to ramble with Mr. White over his own parish of Selborne and form a friendship with the fields and coppices, as well as with the birds, mice and squirrels who inhabit them; or to sail with Robinson Crusoe to his island, and live there with him and his goats and his man Friday . . . or to be ship-wrecked with Ferdinand on that other lovelier island—the island of Prospero and Miranda, and Calaban and Ariel, and nobody else . . . that is best of all. And a small neighbourhood is as good in sober waking reality as in poetry or prose; a village neighbourhood such as this Berkshire hamlet in which I write, a long, straggling, winding street at the bottom of a fine eminence, with a road through it, always abounding in carts, horsemen and carriages, and lately enlivened by a stage-coach from B—— to S——, which passed through about ten days ago, and will, I suppose, return some time or other."

Our Village soon made its mark, and towards the end of June Miss Mitford was able to write to Sir William Elford, "It sells well, and has been received by the literary world and reviewed in all the literary papers better than I, for modesty, dare to say."

Seven months later she wrote to the same friend, "The little prose volume has certainly done its work and made an opening for a longer effort. You would be diverted at some of the instances I could tell you of its popularity. Columbines and children have been named after Mayflower[1]; stage-coachmen and post-boys point out the localities; schoolboys deny the possibility of any woman's having written the *Cricket Match* without schoolboy help; and such men as Lord Stowell (Sir William Scott, the last relique, I believe, of the Literary Club) send to me for a key. I mean to try three volumes of tales next spring. . . . Heaven knows how I shall succeed!

"Of course I shall copy as closely as I can Nature and Miss Austen, keeping, like her, to genteel country life, or rather going a little lower perhaps, and I am afraid with more of sentiment and less of humour. I do not *intend* to commit these delinquencies, mind—I *mean* to keep as playful as I can; but I am afraid of their happening in spite of me."

Before the first volume of *Our Village* had been a year in the hands of the public it had passed into three editions, and by 1826 a second volume had made its appearance, whose success was equally great. With the money gained

[1] Her favourite greyhound.

Mary was soon enabled to add to the comforts of her small establishment. She writes to a friend in the summer of 1824: "We have a pretty little pony-chaise and pony (oh! how I should like to drive you in it!), and my dear father and mother have been out in it three or four times, to my great delight; I am sure it will do them both so much good."

Among the various letters of warm appreciation of *Our Village* received by Miss Mitford was the following from Mrs. Hemans, written on June 6th, 1827:—

"I can hardly feel that I am addressing an entire stranger in the author of *Our Village*," she writes, "and yet I know it is right and proper that I should apologise for the liberty I am taking. But really after having accompanied you, as I have done again and again, in 'violeting' and seeking for wood-sorrel—after having been with you to call upon Mrs. Allen in 'the dell,' and becoming thoroughly acquainted with May and Lizzie, I cannot but hope you will kindly pardon my intrusion, and that my name may be sufficiently known to you to plead my cause. There are writers whose books we cannot read without feeling as if we really *had* looked with them upon the scenes they bring before us. . . . Will you allow me to say that *your* writings have this effect upon me, and that you have

taught me, in making me know and love your 'village' so well, to wish for further knowledge also of *her* who has so vividly impressed its dingles and copses upon my imagination, and peopled them so cheerily with healthful and happy beings? I believe if I could be personally introduced to you that I should in less than five minutes begin to enquire about Lucy and the lilies-of-the-valley, and whether you had succeeded in peopling that 'shady border' in your own territories with those shy flowers."

Writing to her mother from London in November, 1826, Mary says: "I hope that you have by this time received the new number of Blackwood[1] in which I am very pleasantly mentioned in the last article, the 'Noctes Ambrosianæ.'"

It was under this title, the reader may remember, that the celebrated "Christopher North" (John Wilson) was bringing out a series of entertaining conversations on all sorts of subjects supposed to be spoken by North himself and a few fellow habitués of an old-fashioned Edinburgh inn. The character of the "Shepherd," it seems, was drawn from James Hogg the "Ettrick Shepherd." This is the passage alluded to by Miss Mitford—"Noctes Ambrosianæ."

[1] Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine.*

"NOCTES AMBROSIANÆ"

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE SHEPHERD, NORTH, AND TICKLER

SCENE—*Ambrose's Hotel, Picardy Place, Paper Parlour*

Tickler. Master Christopher North, there's Miss Mitford, author of *Our Village*, an admirable person in all respects, of whom you have never, to my recollection, taken any notice in the Magazine. What is the meaning of that? . . .

North. I am waiting for her second volume. Miss Mitford has not, in my opinion, either the pathos or humour of Washington Irving; but she excels him in vigorous conception of character, and in the truth of her pictures of English life and manners. Her writings breathe a sound, pure and healthy morality, and are pervaded by a genuine rural spirit—the spirit of merry England. Every line bespeaks the lady.

Shepherd. I admire Miss Mitford just excessively. I dinna wunner at her being able to write sae weel as she does about drawing-rooms wi' sofas and settees, and about the fine folk in them seein' themselves in lookin'-glasses frae tap to tae; but what puzzles the like o' me is her pictures o' poachers and tinklers . . . and

o' huts and hovels without riggin' by the wayside, and the cottages o' honest, puir men and byres and barns. . . . And merry-makin's at winter-ingles, and courtships aneath trees atween lads and lasses as laigh in life as the servants in her father's ha'. That's the puzzle, and that's the praise. But ae word explains a' —Genius—Genius—wull a' the metaphizzians in the warld ever expound that mysterious monysyllable ?

Tickler. Monosyllable, James, did you say ?

Shepherd. Ay—monysyllable. Does na that mean a word o' three syllables ?

North (in a later review). The young gentlemen of England should be ashamed o' thirselves fo' letten her name be Mitford. They should marry her, whether she wull or no, for she would mak boith a useful and agreeable wife. Thet's the best creetishism on her warks.

CHAPTER XXIV

A COUNTRY-SIDE ROMANCE

THE framework of these stories—that is all that concerns Miss Mitford herself, who figures not only as the narrator but as an actor in the scenes described—is, for the most part, she tells us, strictly true. Thus in giving quotations from her charming tales we are giving also passages from her own daily life, and so we seem to see her walking about the country lanes visiting the cottages or farm-houses, and even to hear her conversing with the villagers.

In a story entitled *Patty's New Hat*, Mary Mitford writes :—

" Wandering about the meadows one morning last May absorbed in the pastoral beauty of the season and the scenery, I was overtaken by a heavy shower, just as I passed old Mrs. Matthew's great farm-house and forced to run for shelter to her hospitable porch. A pleasant shelter in good truth I found there. The green pastures dotted with fine old trees stretching all around ; the clear brook winding about

them, turning and returning on its course, as if loath to depart . . . the village spire rising amongst a cluster of cottages, all but the roofs

OLD BERKSHIRE FARM

and chimneys concealed by a grove of oaks; the woody background and the blue hills in the distance, all so flowery and bowery in the pleasant month of May. The porch, around

which a honeysuckle in full bloom was wreathing its sweet flowers . . . was alive and musical with bees. It is hard to say which enjoyed the sweet breath of the shower and the honeysuckle most, the bees or I ; but the rain began to drive so fast that at the end of five minutes I was not sorry to be discovered by a little girl belonging to the family, and ushered into the spacious kitchen, with its ample dresser glittering with crockery ware, and then finally conducted by Mrs. Matthews herself into her own comfortable parlour.

" On my begging that I might cause no interruption she resumed her labours at a little table [where she was] mending a fustian jacket belonging to one of her sons. On the other side of the little table sat her pretty granddaughter Patty, a black-eyed young woman, with a bright complexion, a neat, trim figure, and a general air of gentility considerably above her station. She was trimming a very smart straw hat with pink ribands, trimming and untrimming, for the bows were tied and untied, taken off and put on, and taken off again, with a look of impatience and discontent, not common to a damsel of seventeen when contemplating a new piece of finery. The poor little lass was evidently out of sorts. She sighed and quirked and fidgeted and seemed ready to cry, whilst her grandmother just glanced at her face under her

spectacles, pursed up her mouth, and contrived with some difficulty not to laugh. At last Patty spoke.

" ' Now, grandmother, you will let me go to Chapel Row revel this afternoon, won't you ? '

" ' Humph,' said Mrs. Matthews.

" ' It hardly rains at all, grandmother ! '

" ' Humph ! ' again said Mrs. Matthews, opening the prodigious scissors with which she was amputating, so to say, a button, and directing the rounded end significantly to my wet shawl, whilst the sharp point was reverted towards the dripping honeysuckle. ' Humph ! '

" ' There's no dirt to signify ! '

" Another ' Humph ! ' and another point to the draggled tail of my white gown.

" ' At all events it's going to clear.'

" Two ' Humphs ! ' and two points, one to the clouds and one to the barometer.

" ' It's only seven miles,' said Patty ; ' and if the horses are wanted, I can walk.'

" ' Humph ! ' quoth Mrs. Matthews.

" ' My Aunt Ellis will be there, and my cousin Mary.'

" ' Humph ! ' again said Mrs. Matthews.

" ' My cousin Mary will be so disappointed.'

" ' Humph ! '

" ' And I half promised my cousin William—poor William ! '

"'Humph!' again.

"'Poor William! Oh, grandmother, do let me go! And I've got my new hat and all—just such a hat as William likes! Poor William! You will let me go, grandmother?'

"And receiving no answer but a very unequivocal 'Humph!' poor Patty threw down her hat, fetched a deep sigh, and sat in a most disconsolate attitude, snipping her pink riband to pieces. Mrs. Matthews went on manfully with her 'stitchery,' and for ten minutes there was a dead pause. It was at last broken by my little friend and introducer, Susan, who was standing at the window, and exclaimed: 'Who is this riding up the meadow all through the rain? Look!—see!—I do think—no, it can't be—yes it is—it is certainly my cousin William Ellis! Look, grandmother!'

"'Humph!' said Mrs. Matthews.

"'What can cousin William be coming for?' continued Susan.

"'Humph!' quoth Mrs. Matthews.

"'Oh, I know!—I know!' screamed Susan, clapping her hands and jumping for joy as she saw the changed expression of Patty's countenance,—the beaming delight, succeeded by a pretty downcast shamefacedness as she turned away from her grandmother's arch smile and archer nod. 'I know! I know!' shouted Susan.

"'Humph!' said Mrs. Matthews.

"'For shame, Susan! Pray don't, grandmother!' said Patty imploringly.

"'For shame! Why I did not say he was coming to court Patty! Did I, grandmother?' returned Susan.

"'And I take this good lady to witness,' replied Mrs. Matthews, as Patty, gathering up her hat and her scraps of riband, prepared to make her escape. 'I take you all to witness that I have said nothing of any sort. Get along with you, Patty!' added she, 'you have spoilt your pink trimming, but I think you are likely to want white ribands next, and if you put me in mind, I'll buy them for you!' And smiling in spite of herself the happy girl ran out of the room."

In one of her tales Miss Mitford describes a fog in her village and its surrounding neighbourhood, contrasting it with a fog in London.

"A London fog," she writes, "is a sad thing, as every inhabitant of London knows full well: dingy, dusky, dirty, damp; an atmosphere black as smoke and wet as steam, that wraps round you like a blanket; a cloud reaching from earth to heaven; 'a palpable obscure,' which not only turns day into night, but threatens to extinguish the lamps and lanthorns with which the poor street wanderers strive to

illuminate their darkness. . . . Of all detestable things a London fog is the most detestable.

" Now a country fog is quite another matter. . . . This last lovely autumn has given us more foggy mornings, or rather more foggy days, than I ever remember to have seen in Berkshire : days beginning in a soft and vapoury mistiness, enveloping the whole country in a veil, snowy, fleecy, and light, as the smoke which one often sees circling in the distance from some cottage chimney, or as the still whiter clouds which float around the moon, and finishing in sunsets of a surprising richness and beauty when the mist is lifted up from the earth and turned into a canopy of unrivalled gorgeousness, purple, rosy and golden. . . .

" It was in one of these days, early in November, that we set out about noon to pay a visit to a friend at some distance. The fog was yet on the earth, only some brightening in the south-west gave token that it was likely to clear away. As yet, however, the mist held complete possession. We could not see the shoemaker's shop across the road—no ! nor our chaise when it drew up before our door ; were fain to guess at our own laburnum tree, and found the sign of The Rose invisible, even when we ran against the sign-post. Our little maid, a kind and careful lass, who, perceiving the dreari-

ness of the weather, followed us across the court with extra wraps, had wellnigh tied my veil round her master's hat and enveloped me in his bearskin, and my dog Mayflower, a white greyhound of the largest size, who had a mind to give us the undesired honour of her company, carried her point, in spite of the united efforts of half a dozen active pursuers, simply because the fog was so thick that nobody could see her. It was a complete game at bo-peep.

"A misty world it was, and a watery; and I . . . began to sigh and shiver and quake, as much from dread of an overturn as from damp and chilliness, whilst my careful driver and his sagacious steed went on groping their way through the woody lanes that lead to the Loddon. Nothing but the fear of confessing my fear, that feeling which makes so many cowards brave, prevented me from begging to turn back again. On, however, we went, the fog becoming every moment heavier as we approached that beautiful and brimming river. My companion, nevertheless, continued to assure me that the day would clear—nay, that it was already clearing; and I soon found that he was right. As we left the river we seemed to leave the fog . . . [and] it was curious to observe how object after object glanced out of the vapour. First of all the huge oak at the corner of Farmer Locke's

field, which juts out into the lane like a crag into the sea . . . its head lost in the clouds ; then Farmer Hewitt's great barn—the house, ricks and stables still invisible ; then a gate and half a cow, her head being projected over it in strong relief, whilst the hinder part of her body remained in the haze ; then more and more distinctly hedgerows, cottages, trees and fields, until, as we reached the top of Barkham Hill, the glorious sun broke forth, and the lovely picture [of the valley] lay before our eyes in its soft and calm beauty."

This account of Mary and her father's expedition in a fog caught the fancy of two authoresses. One—Miss Sedgwick—writes to Mary from the other side of the Atlantic : " Tell me anything of your noble father (long may he live !) whom I have loved ever since you took that ride with him in a one-horse chaise of a misty morning. Do you remember ? "

The other—Mrs. Hemans—writes : " I hope . . . that you were not the worse for that fog, the very description of which almost took my hair out of curl whilst reading it ! "

CHAPTER XXV

A NEW PLAYWRIGHT

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD'S love of the drama was awakened in childhood, and at her school in Hans Place it was much developed. "After my return home," she writes, "came days of eager and solitary poring over the mighty treasures of the printed drama, that finest form of poetry which can never be lost. At school I had been made acquainted, like other schoolgirls, with Racine. Little did Madame de Maintenon, proud queen of the left hand, think when the gentle poet died of a courtly frown, that she and St. Cyr would be best remembered by 'Athalie!'"

As Mary grew up she longed to try her hand at tragedy—that ambition of young writers—but it was not until in later years when spurred on by the necessity of earning money for the support of her father and mother that she conceived the idea of writing plays for the stage. She had heard that occasionally large sums of money were gained by the authors of successful

dramas, and she was encouraged in her undertaking by the recollection that when her poems were first published Coleridge had prophesied that the author of "Blanche" would write a tragedy. "So," writes Mary, "I took heart of grace and resolved to try a play."

Her first attempt, a comedy, was rejected by the manager of a theatre. "Then, nothing daunted," she writes, "I tried tragedy, and produced five acts on the story of *Fiesco*. But just as—conscious of the smallness of my means and the greatness of my object—I was about to relinquish the pursuit in despair, I met with a critic so candid a friend, so kind, that, aided by his encouragement, all difficulties seemed to vanish. I speak," she adds, "of the author of *Ion*—Mr. Justice Talfourd—then a very young man . . . *Foscari* was the result of this encouragement."

But before *Foscari* had appeared on the stage her play of *Julian*, having been read and approved by Macready, was performed with that celebrated actor as the principal character. It was, happily, successful, and, greatly cheered by this result and also by receiving no less than £200 from the manager of Covent Garden theatre, Mary Mitford continued her dramatic work.

But she had to go through many trials con-

nected with it, which often affected her health. The main cause of these trials were the unhappy dissensions between Macready and Charles Kemble, who both appear to have had hasty tempers. Mary writes to Sir William Elford on her return home from a hurried visit to London : " My soul sickens within me when I think of the turmoil and tumult I have undergone and am [still] to undergo. . . . I am tossed about between Kemble and Macready like a cricket-ball—affronting both parties and suspected by both because I will not come to a deadly rupture with either."

But, happily, later on she had reason to think differently about these great actors. She speaks of Macready as " a most ardent and devoted friend " ; and when, in the autumn of 1826, *Foscari* was about to appear on the stage, she says she feels " inclined to hate herself for her mistrust of Charles Kemble." " There are no words for his kindness," she declares, " from the beginning of this affair to the end."

Miss Mitford, accompanied by her father, went up to London for the first performance of *Foscari* at Covent Garden theatre, which was fixed for the 5th November. They lodged at No. 45 Frith Street, Soho Square, whence Mary wrote to her mother an account of the great event. Outside her letter were the words,

"Good news." The letter is dated Saturday night, November 5th :—

"I cannot suffer this parcel to go to you, my dearest mother, without writing a few lines to tell you of the complete success of my play. It was received with rapturous applause [and] without the slightest symptoms of disapprobation from beginning to end. . . . William Harness and Mr. Talfourd are both quite satisfied with the whole affair, and my other friends are half crazy. . . .

"I quite long to hear how you, my own dearest darling, have borne the suspense and anxiety consequent on this affair, which, triumphantly as it has turned out, was certainly a very nervous business. They expect the play to run three times a week till Christmas. It was so immense a house that you might have walked over the heads in the pit ; and great numbers were turned away, in spite of the wretched weather. All the actors were good. . . . Mr. Young gave out the tragedy amidst immense applause."

Mary herself was not present at this wonderful scene. Writing in later years she remarks : "I had not nerve enough to attend the first representation of my tragedies. I sat still and trembling in some quiet apartment near, and thither some friend flew to set my heart at ease.

FRITH STREET, SOHO SQUARE

Generally the messenger of good tidings was poor Haydon, whose quick and ardent spirit lent him wings on such an occasion, and who had full sympathy with my love for a large canvas, however indifferently filled."

When thanking Sir William Elford for his congratulations upon the success of *Foscari*, Miss Mitford says: "Hitherto the success has been very brilliant. We can hardly expect it to last. . . . But great good has been done if (which Heaven avert) the tragedy stop not to-night."

The agreement between the theatre and Miss Mitford for *Foscari*, we are told, was £100 on the third, the ninth, the fifteenth, and the twentieth nights, while the copyright of the play (together with a volume of Dramatic Sketches) was sold to Whittaker for £150..

Miss Mitford had some new and strange experiences connected with the performance of her plays, and amongst these she has recorded her first sight of a theatre by daylight.

"To one accustomed to the imposing aspect of a great theatre at night," she writes, "blazing with light and beauty, no contrast can be greater than to enter the same theatre at noontide. Leaving daylight behind you, and stumbling as best you may through dark passages and amidst the inextricable labyrinth of scenery, [you are]

too happy if you be not projected into the orchestra or swallowed up by a trap-door. . . .

"When the eye becomes accustomed to the darkness the contrasts are sufficiently amusing. Solemn tragedians . . . hatted and great-coated, skipping about, chatting and joking like common mortals . . . tragic heroines sauntering languidly through their parts in the closest of bonnets and thickest of shawls; untidy ballet girls (there was a dance in *Foscari*) walking through their quadrille to the sound of a solitary fiddle, striking up as if of its own accord from amidst the tall stools and music-desks of the orchestra, and piercing, one hardly knew how, through the din that was going on incessantly.

"Oh, that din! Voices from every part, above, below, around, and in every key, bawling, shouting, screaming; heavy weights rolling here and falling there, bells ringing, one could not tell why, and the ubiquitous call-boy everywhere! . . .

"No end to the absurdities and discrepancies of a rehearsal! I contributed my full share to the amount. . . . There is a gun in *Julian*, and I, frightened by one when a child, 'hate a gun like a hurt wild duck' . . . and my first address to Mr. Macready was an earnest entreaty that he would not suffer them to fire

that gun at rehearsal. They did, nevertheless, . . . but the smiling bow of the great tragedian had spared me the worst part of that sort of fright, the expectation. . . .

"Troubled and anxious though they were," she adds, "those were pleasant days, guns and all, days of hope dashed with so much fear, and of fear illumined with fitful rays of hope. And in those rehearsals . . . where nobody is ever found when he is wanted, and nobody ever seems to know a syllable of his part . . . the business must somehow have gone on, for at night the scenes fall into the right places, the proper actors come at the right times, speeches are spoken in due order, and to the no small astonishment of the novice, who had given herself up for lost, the play succeeds."

CHAPTER XXVI

RIENZI

Miss Mitford's capacity of throwing herself heart and soul into the widely varying subjects upon which she was engaged was truly remarkable. For whilst writing her playful or pathetic stories of village life, breathing as they do the calm and beauty of the surrounding country, she was composing one after another her stirring tragedies.

The finest of these is generally considered to be *Rienzi* to which Miss Mitford had given much time and thought. She wrote in August, 1824, to a female friend who had enquired after her literary undertakings :—

"I write as usual for magazines, and (but this is quite between ourselves) I have a tragedy which will I may say certainly—as certainly as we can speak of anything connected with the theatre—be performed at Drury Lane next season. It is the story of 'Rienzi,' the friend of Petrarch ; the man who restored for a short time the old republican government of Rome. If you do not remember the story you will find

it very beautifully told in the last volume of Gibbon, and still more graphically related in L'Abbé de Sadi's *Memoires pour la Vie de Pétrarque.*"

It was not, however, until four years later that the play actually appeared upon the stage. Its success was of vital importance to the little household at Three Mile Cross, and Mary was immersed in business of all sorts during the months preceding its début. Still she had a "heart at leisure" even then to sympathise with her friends in their joys and sorrows. On hearing that Haydon's important picture of the year had just been purchased by the King, she writes :—

"A thousand and a thousand congratulations, my dear friend, to you and your loveliest and sweetest wife ! I always liked the King, God bless him ! He is a gentleman—and now my loyalty will be warmer than ever. . . . This is fortune—fame you did not want—but this fashion and fortune. Nothing in this world could please me more—not even the production of my own *Rienzi*. To see you in your place in Art and Talfourd in his in Parliament are the wishes next my heart, and I verily believe that I shall live to see both. . . .

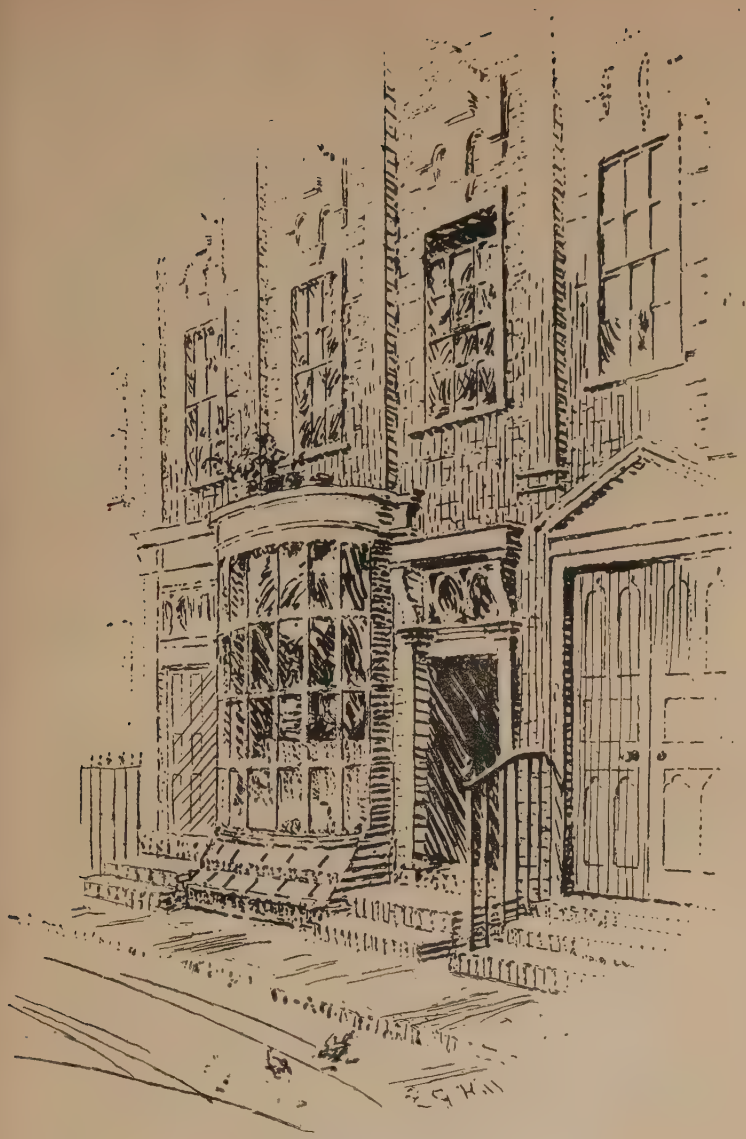
"God bless you, my dear friends ! and God save the King ! "

Miss Mitford writes on Sept. 23rd, 1828, to Sir William Elford :—

"My tragedy of *Rienzi* is to be produced at Drury Lane Theatre on Saturday the 11th of October; that is to say, next Saturday fortnight.

"Mr. Young plays the hero, and has been studying the part during the whole vacation; and a new actress makes her first appearance in the part of the heroine. This is a very bold and hazardous experiment, no new actress having come out in a new play within the memory of man; but she is young, pretty, unaffected, pleasant-voiced, with great sensibility, and a singularly pure intonation—a qualification which no actress has possessed since Mrs. Siddons. Stanfield is painting the new scenes, one of which is an accurate representation of Rienzi's house. This building still exists in Rome. . . . They have got a sketch which they sent for on purpose, and they are hunting up costumes with equal care; so that it will be very splendidly brought out, and I shall have little to fear, except from the emptiness of London so early in the season."

Miss Mitford's next letter to Sir William is written from London after the first performance of *Rienzi*. It is dated Oct. 5th, 1828, 5 Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn, and is as follows:



IN GREAT QUEEN STREET

"Our success last night was very splendid and we have every hope (in the theatrical world there is no such word as 'certainty') of making a great hit. As far as things have hitherto gone nothing can be better—nothing. Our new actress is charming. . . . Mr. Young is also admirable; and, in short, it is a magnificent performance throughout. God grant that its prosperity may continue! and these are not words, of course, but a prayer from my inmost soul, for on that hangs the comfort of those far dearer to me than myself."

And a fortnight later she writes :—

"Hitherto the triumph has been most complete and decisive—the houses crowded—and the attention such as has not been known since Mrs. Siddons. You might hear a pin drop in the house. How long this run may continue I cannot say, for London is absolutely empty; but even if the play were to stop to-night I should be extremely thankful—more thankful than I have words to tell; the impression has been so deep and so general."

Letters of congratulation from women of mark poured in from all sides, but Mary missed the sympathy of her intimate friend Lady Franklin (wife of the Arctic explorer) who had recently died. She remarks in the Introduction to her Dramatic Works :—

"When *Rienzi*, after a more than common portion of adventures and misadventures, did come out with a success rare in a woman's life . . . I missed the eager congratulations from her . . . whose cheering prognostics had so often spurred me on. . . .

"No part of my success," she adds, "was more delightful than the pleasure which it excited amongst the most eminent of my female contemporaries. Maria Edgeworth, Joanna Baillie, Felicia Hemans (and to two of them I was at that time unknown) vied in the cordiality of their praises. Kindness met me on every hand."

In a letter from Mrs. Trollope (a well-known authoress of the day), who was then staying in New York, she learns of *Rienzi* being performed in that city. "It is here and here only," writes Mrs. Trollope, "that I have had an opportunity of seeing *Rienzi;* it is a noble tragedy, and not even the bad acting of the Chatham Theatre could spoil it. I never witnessed such a triumph of powerful poetry over weak acting as in the magnificent scene where Rienzi refuses pardon to an Orsini."

The play continued to draw large audiences at Drury Lane, and ran for a hundred days, a most unusual event in those times. Of the printed play Miss Mitford writes: "It is

selling immensely, the first very large edition having gone in three days."

We have read *Rienzi* with deep interest. The tragic scenes are very powerful, tension being kept up throughout the whole action, while the love passages are beautiful, tender and truly pathetic. If we might venture upon a criticism it is that there is an absence in the play of all humour—a quality so conspicuous in Miss Mitford's village stories. Perhaps it is only Shakespeare who possesses the consummate art of relieving the strain wrought upon the mind by deep tragedy with a touch of humour. It is certainly absent in some of the finest French and German tragedies.

Miss Mitford's incessant work at this period, coupled with much domestic anxiety (for her mother's health was then failing), made her possibly over anxious.

"I shall have hard work," she observes in a letter to a friend, "to write up to my own reputation, for certainly I am at present greatly overrated." And alluding to the triumph of *Rienzi* she says :—

"Dramatic success, after all, is not so delicious, so glorious, so complete a gratification as in our secret longings we all expect to find. It is not satisfactory. It does not fill the heart. . . . It is an intoxication. . . . Within four-and-

twenty hours [of the performance of *Rienzi*] I doubted if triumph there were, and more than doubted if it were deserved. It is ill-success that leads to self-assertion. Never in my life was I so conscious of my dramatic shortcomings as on that day of imputed exaltation and vainglory."

But Mary's fame as a dramatic author was growing in spite of her own modest estimate of her powers, and in spite also of many a disappointment that she had to endure. Her play of Charles I, the subject of which was suggested to her by Macready, was condemned by the Licenser, "who saw a danger to the State in permitting the trial of an English monarch to be represented on the stage." It was forbidden, therefore, at the two great houses although it afterwards appeared at a minor theatre.

The fate of another play, *Inez de Castro*, was still more unfortunate, for after having been rehearsed three times at the Lyceum Theatre, apparently with the approval of all concerned, it was suddenly withdrawn for some unknown reason. Fanny Kemble, whom Miss Mitford describes as "a girl of great ability," was taking the part of the heroine.

"Great at the moment were these anxieties and tribulations," writes Miss Mitford in after

life, "but it is good to observe in one's own mind and good to tell others how just as the keenest physical pain is known to be soon forgotten, so in mental vicissitudes time carries away the bitter and leaves the sweet. The vexations and the injuries fade into dim distance and the kindness and the benefits shine vividly out."

An edition of her collected works was published in Philadelphia in the year 1841, which is prefaced by a short biography of the author written by James Crissy. It is pleasant therein to read his warm-hearted appreciation of her literary genius. He speaks of Miss Mitford as "a dramatist of no common power." "In all her plays," he says, "there is strong, vigorous writing—masculine in the free unhashed use of language, but wholly womanly in its purity from coarseness or licence and in its touches [of the] softest feeling and finest observation."

He goes on, however, to say: "But the claims of Miss Mitford to swell the list of *inventors* [of new styles in literature] rest upon yet firmer grounds. They rest upon those exquisite sketches by which she has created a school of writing, homely but not vulgar, familiar but not breeding contempt. . . . Wherein the small events and the simple characters of rural life

are made interesting by the truth and sprightliness with which they are represented."

In the Introduction to her "Dramatic Works," Miss Mitford thus closes a detailed account of the composition and production of her plays:—

"So much for the Tragedies. There would have been many more such but that the pressing necessity of earning money, and the uncertainties and the delays of the drama, at moments when delay or disappointment weighed upon me like a sin, made it a duty to turn away from the lofty steep of Tragic Poetry to the everyday path of Village Stories."

. . . . .

À propos of these words and knowing that Miss Mitford's greatest power lay in the writing of those very Village Stories, we would quote the words of Tennyson:—

> "Not once or twice in our fair island story
> The path of duty was the way to glory."

CHAPTER XXVII

FOREIGN NEIGHBOURS

"ONE of the prettiest dwellings in our neighbourhood," writes Miss Mitford in one of her stories, "is the Lime Cottage at Burley-Hatch. It consists of a low-browed habitation, so entirely covered with jessamine, honeysuckle, passion-flowers and china roses, as to resemble a bower, and is placed in the centre of a large garden. On either side of the neat gravel walk which leads from the outer gate to the door of the cottage stand the large and beautiful trees to which it owes its name; spreading their strong, broad shadow over the turf beneath, and sending, on a summer afternoon, their rich spring fragrance half across the irregular village green. . . .

"Such is the habitation of Thérèse de G., an *émigrée* of distinction, whose aunt having married an English officer, was luckily able to afford her niece an asylum during the horrors of the Revolution, and to secure to her a small annuity and the Lime Cottage after her death.

There she has lived for five-and-thirty years, gradually losing sight of her few and distant foreign connections, and finding all her happiness in her pleasant home and her kind neighbours—a standing lesson in cheerfulness and contentment.

"A very popular person is Mademoiselle Thérèse—popular both with high and low; for the prejudice which the country people almost universally entertain against foreigners vanished directly before the charm of her manners. . . . She is so kind to them too, so liberal of the produce of her orchard and garden and so full of resources in their difficulties. Among the rich she is equally beloved. No party is complete without the pleasant French woman. Her conversation is not very powerful, not very brilliant—but then it is so good-natured, so genuine, so constantly up and alive;—to say nothing of the charm which it derives from her language, which is alternately the most graceful and purest French and the most diverting and absurd broken English. . . .

"Her appearance betrays her country almost as much as her speech. She is a French-looking little personage with a slight, active figure, exceedingly nimble and alert in every movement; a round and darkly complexioned face, somewhat faded and passée but still striking

from the laughing eyes. Nevertheless, in her youth, she must have been pretty; so pretty that some of our young ladies, scandalised at finding their favourite an old maid, have invented sundry legends to excuse the solecism, and talk of duels fought *pour l'amour de ses beaux yeux*, and of a betrothed lover guillotined in the Revolution. And the thing may have been so; although one meets everywhere with old maids who have been pretty, and whose lovers have not been guillotined. I rather suspect our fair demoiselle of having been in her youth a little of a flirt.

"Even during her residence at Burley-Hatch hath not she indulged in divers very distant, very discreet, very decorous, but still very evident flirtations? Did not Doctor Abdy, the portly, ruddy schoolmaster of B. dangle after her for three mortal years, holidays excepted? And did she not refuse him at last? And Mr. Foreclose, the thin, withered, wrinkled city solicitor, a man, so to say, smoke-dried, who comes down every year to Burley for the air, did not he do suit and service to her during four long vacations with the same ill-success? Was not Sir Thomas himself a little smitten? Nay, even now, does not the good major, a halting veteran of seventy—but really it is too bad to tell tales out of the parish—all

that is certain is that Mademoiselle Thérèse might have changed her name long before now had she so chosen.

"Her household consists of her little maid Betsy, a cherry-cheeked, blue-eyed country lass, who with a fair unmeaning countenance, copies the looks and gestures of her alert and vivacious mistress, and of a fat lap-dog, called Fido, silky, sleepy and sedate. . . .

"If everybody is delighted to receive this most welcome visitor, so is everybody delighted to accept her graceful invitations, and meet to eat strawberries at Burley-Hatch.

"Oh, how pleasant are those summer afternoons, sitting under the blossomed limes, with the sun shedding a golden light through the broad branches, the bees murmuring overhead, roses and lilies all about us, and the choicest fruit served up in wicker baskets of her own making. . . . Those are pleasant meetings; nor are her little winter parties less agreeable, when to two or three female friends assembled round their coffee, she will tell thrilling stories of that terrible Revolution, so fertile in great crimes and great virtues. Or [relate] gayer anecdotes of the brilliant days preceding that convulsion, the days which Madame de Genlis has described so well, when Paris was the capital of pleasure, and amusement the business

of life ; illustrating her descriptions by a series of spirited drawings of costumes and characters done by herself, and always finishing by producing a group of Louis Seize, Marie Antoinette, the Dauphin, and Madame Elizabeth, as she had last seen them at Versailles—the only recollections that ever bring tears into her smiling eyes.

" Madame Thérèse's loyalty to the Bourbons was in truth a very real feeling. Her family had been about the Court, and she had imbibed an enthusiasm for the royal sufferers natural to a young and warm heart—she loved the Bourbons and hated Napoleon with like ardour. All her other French feelings had for some time been a little modified. She was not quite so sure as she had been that France was the only country, and Paris the only city of the world ; that Shakespeare was a barbarian, and Milton no poet ; that the perfume of English limes was nothing compared to French orange trees ; that the sun never shone in England ; and that sea-coal fires were bad things. . . . Her loyalty to her legitimate king was, however, as strong as ever, and that loyalty had nearly cost us our dear mademoiselle.

" After the Restoration, she hastened, as fast as steamboat and diligence could carry her, to enjoy the delight of seeing once more the Bour-

bons and the Tuileries; took leave, between smiles and tears, of her friends, and of Burley-Hatch, carrying with her a branch of the lime-tree, then in blossom, and commissioning her old lover, Mr. Foreclose, to dispose of the cottage: but in less than three months, luckily before Mr. Foreclose had found a purchaser, mademoiselle came home again. She complained of nobody; but times were altered. The house in which she was born was pulled down; her friends were scattered, her kindred dead; Madame (la Duchess d'Angoulême) did not remember her . . . the King did not know her again (poor man! he had not seen her for these thirty years); Paris was a new city; the French were a new people; she missed the sea-coal fires; and for the stunted orange-trees at the Tuileries, what were they compared with the blossomed limes of Burley-Hatch!"[1]

Another foreign neighbour, described by Miss Mitford, was an old French *émigré* who came to reside in "the small town of Hazelby"; a pretty little place where everything seemed at a standstill. . . . "It has not even a cheap shop," she remarks, "for female gear. . . . The very literature of Hazelby is doled out at the pastry-cook's, in a little one-windowed shop,

[1] We think this place may have been intended for Burghfield Hatch.

kept by Matthew Wise. Tarts occupy one end of the counter and reviews the other; whilst the shelves are parcelled out between books, and dolls, and gingerbread. It is a question by which of his trades poor Matthew gains least."

Here it was that the old *émigré* lodged "in a low three-cornered room, over the little shop, which Matthew Wise designated his 'first floor.'" Little was known of him, but that he was a thin, pale, foreign-looking gentleman, who shrugged his shoulders in speaking, took a great deal of snuff, and made a remarkably low bow. But it soon appeared from a written paper placed in a conspicuous part of Matthew's shop, that he was an Abbé, and that he would do himself the honour of teaching French to any of the nobility and gentry of Hazelby who might think fit to employ him. Pupils dropped in rather slowly. The curate's daughters, and the attorney's son, and Miss Deane the milliner—but she found the language difficult, and left off, asserting that M. l'Abbé's snuff made her nervous. At last poor M. l'Abbé fell ill, really ill, dangerously ill, and Matthew Wise went in all haste to summon Mr. Hallett (the apothecary). . . .

"Now Mr. Hallett was what is usually called a rough diamond. He piqued himself on being a plain downright Englishman [and] he had such

an aversion to a Frenchman, in general, as a cat has to a dog: and was wont to erect himself into an attitude of defiance and wrath at the mere sight of the object of his antipathy. He hated and despised the whole nation, abhorred the language, and "would as lief," he assured Matthew, "have been called in to a toad." He went, however, grew interested in the case, which was difficult and complicated; exerted all his skill, and in about a month accomplished a cure.

By this time he had also become interested in his patient, whose piety, meekness, and resignation had won upon him in an extraordinary degree. The disease was gone, but a languor and lowness remained, which Mr. Hallett soon traced to a less curable disorder, poverty. The thought of the debt to himself evidently weighed on the poor Abbé's spirits, and our good apothecary at last determined to learn French purely to liquidate his own long bill.

It was the drollest thing in the world to see this pupil of fifty, whose habits were so entirely unfitted for a learner, conning his task. . . . He was a most unpromising scholar, shuffled the syllables together in a manner that would seem incredible, and stumbled at every step of the pronunciation, against which his English tongue rebelled amain. Every now and then

he solaced himself with a fluent volley of execrations in his own language, which the Abbé understood well enough to return, after rather a polite fashion, in French. It was a most amusing scene. But the motive ! the generous noble motive !

M. l'Abbé after a few lessons detected this delicate artifice, and, touched almost to tears, insisted on dismissing his pupil, who, on his side, declared that nothing should induce him to abandon his studies. At last they came to a compromise. The cherry-cheeked Margaret . . . [who kept the doctor's house] took her uncle's post as a learner, which she filled in a manner much more satisfactory ; and the good old Frenchman not only allowed Mr. Hallett to administer gratis to his ailments, but partook of his Sunday dinner as long as he lived.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AGREEABLE JAUNTS

Mary Russell Mitford visited Southampton in the year 1812, and although only one of her letters written at that time has been preserved it gives us a vivid picture of her impressions of the place. The letter is dated September 3rd.

"I have just returned from Southampton," she writes to Sir William Elford. "Have you ever been at that lovely spot, which combines all that is enchanting in wood and land and water with all that is 'buxom, blythe and debonair' in society—that charming town, which is not a watering-place only because it is something better? . . . Southampton has, in my eyes, an attraction independent even of its scenery in the total absence of the vulgar hurry of business or the chilly apathy of fashion. It is indeed all life, all gaiety; but it has an airiness, an animation which might become the capital of Fairyland. The very motion of its playful waters, uncontaminated by commerce or by war, seems in unison with the graceful yachts that sail upon their bosom."

THE WEST GATE, SOUTHAMPTON

She admired the ruins of Netley Abbey, and writes in one of her poems :—

> " Methinks that e'en from Netley's gloom
> To look upon the tide
> Seems gazing from the shadowy tomb
> On life and all its pride."

At a much later date Miss Mitford visited Bath.

" Bath is a very elegant and classical-looking city," she writes, " standing upon a steep hillside, its regular white buildings rising terrace above terrace, crescent above crescent, glittering in the sun, and charmingly varied by the green trees of its park and gardens. . . . Very pleasant is Bath to look at. But when contrasted with its old reputation as the favourite resort of the noble and the fair . . . it is impossible not to feel that the spirit has departed ; that it is a city of memories, the very Pompeii of watering-places."

Again she writes : " A place full of associations is Bath. When we had fairly done with the real people there were great fictions to fall back upon, and I am not sure . . . that those who never lived except in the writings of other people—the heroes and heroines of Miss Austen, for example—are not the more real of the two. Her exquisite story of *Persuasion* absolutely

haunted me. Whenever it rained I thought of Anne Elliott meeting Captain Wentworth, when driven by a shower to take refuge in a shoe-shop.

PULTENEY BRIDGE

Whenever I got out of breath in climbing up-hill I thought of that same charming Anne Elliott, and of that ascent from the lower town

to the upper, during which all her tribulations ceased. And when at last by dint of trotting up one street and down another I incurred the unromantic calamity of a blister on the heel, even that grievance became classical by the recollection of the similar catastrophe which, in consequence of her peregrinations with the Admiral, had befallen dear Mrs. Croft."

Miss Mitford writes in one of her letters of a "most agreeable jaunt to Richmond."

"God made the country and man made the town!" "I wonder," she says, "in which of the two divisions Cowper would place Richmond. Every Londoner would laugh at the rustic who should call it town, and with foreigners it passes pretty generally for a sample (the only one they see) of the rural villages of England; and yet it is no more like the country, the real untrimmed genuine country, than a garden is like a field. Richmond is Nature in a court dress, but still Nature—aye, and very lovely nature too, gay and happy and elegant as one of Charles the Second's beauties, and with as little to remind one of the penalty of labour, or poverty, or grief, or crime. To the casual visitor (at least) Richmond appears as a sort of fairyland, a piece of old Arcadia, a holiday spot for ladies and gentlemen, where they had a happy out-of-door life, like the gay

folks in Watteau's pictures, and have nothing to do with the workaday world. . . .

"Here is Richmond Park, where Jeanie Deans and the Duke of Argyle met Queen Caroline; it has been improved, unluckily, and the walk where the interview took place no longer exists. To make some amends, however, for this disappointment, [we are told that] in removing some furniture from an old house in the town three portraits were discovered in the wainscot, George the Second, a staring likeness, between Lady Suffolk and Queen Caroline. The paintings were the worst of that bad era, but the position of the three and the recollection of Jeanie Deans was irresistible; those pictures ought never to be separated."

"The principal charm of this smiling landscape," she continues, "is the river, the beautiful river. Brimming to its very banks of meadow or of garden; clear, pure and calm as the bright sky which is reflected in clearer brightness from its bosom." As her boat glides along its smooth surface amid scenes of ever-changing beauty and interest, Miss Mitford's thoughts turn to Sir Joshua Reynolds. "His villa is here," she exclaims, "rich in remembrances of Johnson and Boswell and Goldsmith and Burke; here again the elegant house of Owen Cambridge; close by the celebrated villa

of Pope, where one seems to see again Swift and Gay, St. John and Arbuthnot. A stone's-throw off the still more celebrated Gothic toy-shop, Strawberry Hill, which we all know so well from the minute and vivid descriptions of its master, the most amusing of letter-writers, the most fashionable of antiquaries, the most learned of *petit-maîtres*, the cynical, finical, delightful Horace Walpole."

Then Miss Mitford tells us of " the landing at Hampton Court, the palace of the cartoons and of the ' Rape of the Lock,' and lastly of her coming home with her mind full of the divine Raphael . . . strangely chequered and intersected by vivid images of the fair Belinda, and of that inimitable game at ombre which will live longer than any painting, and can only die with the language."

Here we would venture to give some passages from the " Rape of the Lock " for the benefit of those who may not as yet have made the acquaintance of the " fair Belinda." This poem, so full of wit and fairy fancy, was written by Pope to commemorate an event which had actually occurred. It happened when a party of noble friends had met together in a stately room in Hampton Court Palace and were gathered around a table prepared for a game at ombre.

The heroine Belinda (whose real name was Arabella Fermor), famous for her beauty and for her "sprightly mind," was wooed by a certain young Lord Petre, who ardently desired to possess one of "the shining ringlets" that decked "her smooth ivory neck." Meanwhile invisible sylphs and sprites, aware that some "dire disaster" threatens to befall the unconscious Belinda, hover protectingly about her. Even the very cards take part in the drama, giving omens alternately of good or of evil. At last Belinda wins the game and rejoices, but all too soon it seems in her triumph.

The cards removed

> "the board with cups and spoons is crowned,
> The berries crackle and the mill turns round,

but coffee alas!

> Sent up in vapours to the Baron's brain,
> New stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain.
> . . . Just then Clarissa drew, with tempting grace,
> A two-edged weapon from her shining case.
> He takes the gift with reverence and extends
> The little engine on his fingers' ends;
> This just behind Belinda's neck he spread
> As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
> Swift to the Lock a thousand sprites repair,
> A thousand wings by turns blow back the hair;
>
> The peer now spreads the glittering forfex wide
> To enclose the Lock; now joins it to divide.

. . . The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, for ever and for ever !

. . . . . .

The Lock, obtained with guilt and kept with pain,
In every place is sought, but sought in vain :
With such a prize no mortal must be blest,
So Heaven decrees : with Heaven who can contest ?
. . . Then cease, bright nymph ! to mourn thy ravished hair
Which adds new glory to the shining sphere !
Not all the tresses that fair heads can boast
Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.
For after all the murders of your eye,
When after millions slain, yourself shall die.
. . . This Lock the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name."

CHAPTER XXIX

UFTON COURT

ONE of the most striking buildings in the beautiful county of Berkshire often visited by Miss Mitford is Ufton Court, a stately manor-house of considerable extent "that stands on the summit of a steep acclivity looking over a rich and fertile valley to a range of wooded hills."

The court is approached by a double avenue of oaks, on emerging from which the fine old Elizabethan mansion is seen rising beyond its smooth-spreading lawns and shady trees. It is surmounted "by more gable ends than a lazy man would care to count on a sunny day," and by tall clustered chimneys. Its long façade is flanked by two projecting wings, and in the centre is a large porch, forming the letter E in the true Elizabethan style. The entrance door of solid oak studded with great nails might well have resisted an ancient battering-ram.

In the northern wing of Ufton Court we come once more upon associations with the name of

THE PORCH

ARABELLA FERMOR (MRS. PERKINS)
By W. Sykes

FRANCIS PERKINS
By W. Sykes

Arabella Fermor—the "fair Belinda" of the "Rape of the Lock." Here it was that she came to live upon her marriage in 1715 with Mr. Francis Perkins, a member of an ancient Roman Catholic family. Mr. Perkins in honour of his bride had the rooms in this wing newly decorated in the elegant style of the early eighteenth century. The ceiling of the larger room, which is still called Belinda's Parlour, is adorned with mouldings of graceful design, while the small panelling on the walls was replaced by the tall decorated panels then just come into fashion. In the same way a lofty window was introduced to shed light upon the whole.

We learn from an old list of the furniture of Ufton Court that in a small room near to Belinda's Parlour there stood formerly a harpsichord and an ombre table, the latter singularly suggestive of the heroine of the "Rape of the Lock."[1]

Two fine portraits exist of Mr. and Mrs. Perkins, which probably hung in Belinda's room. They are both signed with the name of W. Sykes, an artist who flourished in the early part of the eighteenth century. That of Mrs. Perkins must have been painted before her marriage, as her maiden name is inscribed upon

[1] See *The History of Ufton Court*, by H. Mary Sharp.

the picture, together with two lines from the "Rape of the Lock," thus :—

Mrs. Arabella Fermor

"On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss and Infidels adore."

The lady's dress is of a soft greenish blue colour so often seen in portraits of that period.

The only engravings which exist of these portraits were taken from copies of them made by Gardner, but they are not satisfactory, and it is to the kindness of the present owner of the original pictures that we are indebted for permission to reproduce them in this work.

Mary Russell Mitford has written much of Ufton Court. She delighted in wandering about the old rambling mansion. "It retained strong marks of former stateliness," she writes, "in the fine proportion of the lofty and spacious apartments, the rich mouldings of the ceilings, the carved chimney-pieces and panelled walls; while the fragments of stained glass in the windows of the great gallery, the relics of mouldering tapestry that fluttered against the walls, and above all the secret chamber constructed for a priest's hiding-place in the days of Protestant persecution conspired to give Mrs. Radcliffe-like Castle of Udolpho sort of romance to the manor-house."

"The priest's hiding-place," she continues, "was discovered early in the nineteenth cen-

BELINDA'S PARLOUR

tury. A narrow ladder led down into this gloomy resort, and at the bottom was found a

crucifix. As many as a dozen carefully masked openings into dark hiding-places have been discovered in this storey; no doubt they were connected one with the other, although the clue to the labyrinth is wanting."

A broad terrace walk lies behind the Court, and from this terrace a flight of stone steps of quaint construction leads down to a beautiful walled garden. Here we can imagine Belinda and her friends enjoying the delights of a summer evening and surveying the wide view which lies beyond the garden of sloping fields to a wooded valley watered by a rushing stream.

A pathway of the softest turf leads from the foot of the steps across the garden to the pillars of a former gateway surmounted by stone balls and flanked by two ancient gnarled yews, which stand like sentinels to guard the entrance. In the centre of the garden the turf widens to a circular piece of lawn, upon which stands an old sundial. It is surrounded by gay flowers of all sorts, and is partly enclosed by a rustic fence, forming a fairy garden as it were within the great garden.

Beyond the main boundary wall the greensward slopes down abruptly to a chain of fish ponds. These must have been kept neat and trim when fish, so much needed for a Roman Catholic household, was difficult to obtain

THE GARDEN STEPS

beyond the precincts of the Court. But the ponds are beautiful in their neglected condition, with their luxuriant growth of water plants, their surrounding trees, whose branches are reflected below, and the occasional glimpse of a moorhen skimming past.

Miss Mitford speaks of there being "on the lawn in front of the mansion some magnificent elms, splendid both in size and form, and one gigantic broad-browed oak—the real oak of the English forest—that must have seen many centuries." Its upper boughs have now gone, but its huge trunk and lower foliage still remain.

It is of this oak that a poetess of the day wrote :—

"Triumphant o'er the tooth of time
And o'er the woodman's blade,
Yon oak still rears its head sublime
And spreads its ample shade."

À propos of Ufton Court, with its ingeniously contrived hiding-places for unhappy refugees, Miss Mitford writes : "I am indebted to my friend Mrs. Hughes for the account of another hiding-place in which the interest is ensured by that charm of charms—an unsolved and insoluble mystery."

On some alterations being projected in a large mansion in Scotland belonging to the late Sir George Warrender, the architect, after examin-

ing and, so to say, studying the house, declared that there was a space in the centre for which there was no accounting, and that there must certainly be a concealed chamber. Neither master nor servants had ever heard of such a thing, and the assertion was treated with some scorn. The architect, however, persisted, and at last proved by the sure test of measurement . . . that the space he had spoken of did exist, and as no entrance of any sort could be discovered from the surrounding rooms it was resolved to make an incision in the wall. A large and lofty apartment was disclosed, richly and completely furnished as a bed-chamber ; a large four-post bed, spread with blankets, counterpanes, and the finest sheets was prepared for instant occupation. The very wax lights in the candlesticks stood ready for lighting. The room was heavily hung and carpeted as if to deaden sound, and was of course perfectly dark. No token was found to indicate the intended occupant, for it did not appear to have been used, and the general conjecture was that the refuge had been prepared for some unfortunate Jacobite in the '15, who had either fallen into the hands of the Government or had escaped from the kingdom.

CHAPTER XXX

A FURTHER GLANCE AT OUR VILLAGE

Miss Mitford writes in 1830 :—

"Our village continues to stand pretty much where it did, and has undergone as little change in the last two years as any hamlet of its inches in the county. . . . I have hinted that it had a trick of standing still, of remaining stationary, unchanged and unimproved in this most changeable and improving world. . . . There it stands, the same long straggling street of pretty cottages divided by pretty gardens, wholly unchanged in size or appearance, unincreased and undiminished by a single brick.

"Ah, the in-and-out cottage! the dear, dear home! . . . No changes there! except that the white kitten who sits purring at the window under the great myrtle has succeeded to his lamented grandfather, our beautiful Persian cat. I cannot find an alteration. To be sure, yesterday evening a slight misfortune happened to our goodly tenement, occasioned by the unlucky diligence which, under the conduct of a

sleepy coachman and a restive horse, contrived to knock down and demolish the wall of our court, and fairly to drive through the front garden, thereby destroying sundry curious stocks, carnations and geraniums. It is a mercy that the unruly steed was content with battering the wall. . . . There was quite din enough without any addition. The three insides (ladies) squalling from the interior of that commodious vehicle; the outsides (gentlemen) swearing on the roof; the coachman still half asleep, but unconsciously blowing his horn; we in the house screaming and scolding; the passers-by shouting and hallooing; May, who little brooked such an invasion of her territories, barking in her tremendous lion note, and putting down the other noises like a clap of thunder. The passengers, coachman, horses and spectators all righted at last, and no harm done but to my flowers and to the wall. May, however, stands bewailing the ruins, for that low wall was her favourite haunt; she used to parade backwards and forwards on the top of it as if to show herself, just after the manner of a peacock on the top of a house. But the wall is to be rebuilt to-morrow with old weather-stained bricks—no patchwork! exactly in the same form; May herself will not find out the difference, so that in the way of alteration this little misfortune will pass

for nothing. Neither have we any improvements worth calling such, except that the wheeler's green door has been retouched out of the same pot (as I judge from the tint) with which he furbished up our new-old pony-chaise ; that the shop window of our neighbour, the universal dealer Bromley's, hath been beautified, and his name and calling splendidly set forth in yellow letters on a black ground ; and that our landlord of the ' Rose ' has hoisted a new sign of unparalleled splendour."

Miss Mitford happened to possess an " historic staff " which she greatly valued, and which had been handed down from one relative to another from its former owner—that Duchess of Athol and Lady of Man of whom mention has been made in an earlier chapter.

At the period we are writing of Miss Mitford used the staff rather as an ornament than otherwise, being then, as she says, " the best walker of her years for a dozen miles round " ; but in later life she was glad of its support. " Now this staff," she writes, " one of the oldest friends I have in the world, is pretty nearly as well known as myself in our Berkshire village."

One day the stick was not to be found in its usual place in the hall, " it was missing, was gone, was lost ! " A great search was made for it far and wide. " Really, ma'am," quoth her

faithful maid, "there is some comfort in the interest the people take in the stick! If it were anything alive—the pony, or Fanchon, or ourselves—they could not be more sorry. Master Brent, ma'am, at the top of the street, he promises to speak to everybody, so does William Wheeler, who goes everywhere, and Mrs. Bromley at the shop; and the carrier and the postman. I daresay the whole parish knows it by this time! I have not been outside the gate to-day, but a dozen people have asked me if we had heard of *our* stick!"

The bustle of the village and the anxiety of Mary were, however, soon to be allayed. "At ten o'clock one evening a rustling of the front door latch was heard, together with a pattering of little feet, then the little feet advanced into the house and some little tongues gained courage to tell their good news—the stick was found!

An intimate friend of Miss Mitford's, a certain Miss James, of Binfield Park, had been staying for a short time at the inn hard by, on which occasion Mary addressed the following lines to her:—

"The village inn! The wood-fire burning bright,
The solitary taper's flickering light!
The lowly couch! the casement swinging free!
My noblest friend, was this a place for thee?

Yet in that humble room, from all apart,
We poured forth mind for mind and heart for heart,
Ranging from idlest words and tales of mirth
To the deep mysteries of heaven and earth.

. . . . . .

No fitting place ; yet (inconsistent strain
And selfish) come, I prythee ! come again."

In a story entitled *The Black Velvet Bag* Miss Mitford has given an amusing account of some of her shopping experiences in " Belford Regis," her name for Reading, where the various purchases for the small household of Three Mile Cross were usually made.

" Last Friday fortnight," she writes, " was one of those anomalies in the weather with which we English people are visited for our sins ; a day of intolerable wind and insupportable dust, an equinoctial gale out of season, a piece of March unnaturally foisted into the very heart of May. . . . On that day did I set forth to the good town of B—— on the feminine errand called shopping. I am a true daughter of Eve, a dear lover of bargains and bright colours, and, knowing this, have generally been wise enough to keep as much as I can out of temptation. At last a sort of necessity arose for some slight purchases. The shopping was inevitable, and I undertook the whole concern at once, most heroically resolving to spend just

so much and no more, and half comforting myself that I had a full morning's work of indispensables and should have no time for extraneous extravagances.

"There was to be sure a prodigious accumulation of errands and wants. The evening before they had been set down in great form on a slip of paper headed thus—'things wanted.' To how many and various catalogues that title would apply—from him who wants a blue riband to him who wants bread and cheese! My list was astounding. It was written in double columns in an invisible hand. . . . In good open printing it would have cut a respectable figure as a catalogue and filled a decent number of pages—a priced catalogue too, for as I had a given sum to carry to market I amused myself with calculating the proper and probable cost of every article, in which process I most egregiously cheated the shop-keeper and myself by copying with the credulity of hope from the puffs of newspapers, and expecting to buy fine solid wearable goods at advertising prices. In this way I stretched my money a good deal further than it would go, and swelled my catalogue, so that at last, in spite of compression, I had no room for another word, and was obliged to crowd several small but important articles such as cotton, laces, pins, needles,

shoe-strings, etc., into that very irregular and disorderly store-house—that place where most things deposited are lost—*my memory*, by courtesy so called.

" The written list was safely consigned, with a well-filled purse, to my usual repository, a black velvet bag, and the next morning I and my bag, with its nicely balanced contents of wants and money, were safely convoyed in a little open carriage to the good town of B——. There I dismounted and began to bargain most vigorously, visiting the cheapest shops, cheapening the cheapest articles, yet wisely buying the strongest and the best, a little astonished at first to find everything so much dearer than I had set it down, yet soon reconciled to this misfortune by the magical influence which shopping possesses over a woman's fancy—all the sooner reconciled as the monetary list lay unlooked at and unthought of in its grave receptacle, the black velvet bag.

" On I went with an air of cheerful business, of happy importance, till my money began to wax small. Certain small aberrations had occurred, too, in my economy. One article that had happened, by rare accident, to be below my calculation, and indeed below any calculation—calico at ninepence, fine, thick, strong, wide calico at ninepence absolutely enchanted

me and I took the whole piece ; then after buying M. [material for] a gown according to order, I saw one that I liked better and bought that too. Then I fell in love, was actually captivated by a sky-blue sash and handkerchief,—not the poor, thin greeny colour which usually passes under that dishonoured name, but the rich full tint of the noonday sky, and a cap riband really pink that might have vied with the inside leaves of a moss-rose. Then in hunting after cheapness I got into obscure shops where, not finding what I asked for, I was fain to take something that they had, purely to make a compensation for the trouble of lugging out drawers and answering questions. Lastly I was fairly coaxed into some articles by the irresistibility of the sellers, [in one case] by the fluent impudence of a lying shopman who, under cover of a well-darkened window, affirmed on his honour that his brown satin was a perfect match to my green pattern, and forced the said satin down my throat accordingly. With these helps my money melted all too fast ; at half-past five my purse was entirely empty, and as shopping with an empty purse has by no means the relish of shopping with a full one I was quite willing and ready to go home to dinner, pleased as a child with my purchases and wholly unsuspecting the sins of omission, the errands unper-

formed, which were the natural result of my unconsulted *memoranda* and my treacherous memory.

"Home I returned a happy and proud woman, wise in my own conceit, a thrifty fashion-monger, laden like a pedlar, with huge packages in stout brown holland tied up with whipcord, and genteel little parcels papered and pack-threaded in shopman-like style. At last we were safely stowed in the pony-chaise, which had much ado to hold us, my little black bag as usual in my lap. When we ascended the steep hill out of B—— a sudden puff of wind took at once my cottage-bonnet and my large cloak, blew the bonnet off my head so that it hung behind me, suspended by the riband, and fairly snapped the string of the cloak, which flew away much in the style of John Gilpin's renowned in story. My companion, pitying my plight, exerted himself manfully to regain the fly-away garments, shoved the head into the bonnet, or the bonnet over the head (I do not know which phrase best describes the manœuvre), with one hand and recovered the refractory cloak with the other. It was wonderful what a tug he was forced to give before that obstinate cloak could be brought round; it was swelled with the wind like a bladder, animated, so to say, like a living thing, and threatened to carry

pony and chaise and riders and packages backward down the hill, as if it had been a sail of a ship. At last the contumacious garment was mastered. We righted, and by dint of sitting sideways and turning my back on my kind comrade, I got home without any further damage than the loss of my bag, which, though not missed before the chaise had been unladen, had undoubtedly gone by the board in the gale, and I lamented my trusty companion without in the least foreseeing the use it would probably be of to my reputation.

" Immediately after dinner I produced my purchases. They were much admired, and the quantity when spread out in our little room being altogether dazzling, and the quality satisfactory, the cheapness was never doubted. Nobody calculated, and the bills being really lost in the lost bag, and the particular prices just as much lost in memory (the ninepenny calico was the only article whose cost occurred to me), I passed, without telling anything like a fib, merely by a discreet silence, for the best and thriftiest bargainer that ever went shopping. After some time spent very pleasantly in admiration on one side and display on the other we were interrupted by the demand for some of the little articles which I had forgotten.

" ' The sewing-silk, please, ma'am.'

" ' Sewing-silk ! I don't know—look about.'

" Ah ! she might look long enough ! no sewing-silk was there. ' Very strange.'

" Presently came other enquiries. ' Where's the tape ? ' ' The tape ! '

" ' Yes, my dear ; and the needles, pins, cotton, stay-laces, boot-laces.'

" ' The bobbin, the ferret, shirt buttons, shoe-strings ? ' quoth she of the sewing-silk, taking up the cry, and forthwith began a search. . . . At last she suddenly desisted from her rummage.

" ' Without doubt, ma'am, they are in the reticule, and all lost,' said she in a very pathetic tone.

" ' Really,' said I, a little conscious stricken, ' I don't recollect, perhaps I might forget.'

" ' But you never could forget so many things ; besides, you wrote them down.'

" ' I don't know. I am not sure.' But I was not listened to ; Harriet's conjecture had been metamorphosed into a certainty ; all my sins of omission were stowed in the reticule, and before bed-time the little black bag held forgotten things enough to fill a sack.

" Never was reticule so lamented by all but its owner ; a boy was immediately dispatched to look for it, and on his returning empty-handed there was even a talk of having it cried. My care, on the other hand, was all directed to

prevent its being found. I had had the good luck to lose it in a suburb of B—— renowned for filching, and I remembered that the street was at that moment full of people . . . so I went to bed in the comfortable assurance that it was gone for ever.

" But there is nothing certain in this world—not even a thief's dishonesty. Two old women, who had pounced at once on my valuable property, quarrelled about the plunder, and one of them in a fit of resentment at being cheated of her share went to the mayor of B—— and informed against her companion. The mayor, an intelligent and active magistrate, immediately took the disputed bag and all its contents into his own possession, and as he is also a man of great politeness he restored it as soon as possible to the right owner. The very first thing that saluted my eyes when I awoke in the morning was a note from Mr. Mayor with a sealed packet. The fatal truth was visible. There it lay, that identical black bag, with its name-tickets, its cambric handkerchief, its unconsulted list and its thirteen bills. . . . I had recovered my reticule and lost my reputation ! "

CHAPTER XXXI

ECCENTRIC NEIGHBOURS

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD had strong likes and dislikes. Her American friend Mr. James T. Fields, who knew her well, remarks :[1] "She loathed mere dandies, and there were no epithets too hot for her contempt in that direction. Old beaux she heartily despised, and speaking of one whom she had known, I remember she quoted with a fine scorn this appropriate passage from Dickens : 'Ancient, dandified men, those crippled *invalides* from the campaign of vanity, where the only powder was hair-powder and the only bullets fancy balls.'"

In one of her stories we come upon such a character—Mr. Thompson as she calls him—a gentleman who had just arrived from London, and whom she met at the house of a friend.

"Mr. Thompson was a gentleman of about—Pshaw ! nothing is so impolite as to go guessing how many years a man may have lived in this most excellent world, especially when it is per-

[1] See *Yesterdays with Authors.*

fectly clear from his dress and demeanour that the register of his birth is the last document relating to himself which he would care to see produced.

" Mr. Thompson then was a gentleman of no particular age, not quite so young as he had been, but still in very tolerable preservation, being pretty exactly that which is understood by the phrase an Old Beau."

And then, after describing the very artificial appearance of his physiognomy, she goes on to say : " Altogether it was a head calculated to convey a very favourable impression of the different artists employed in getting it up."

A very different personage to the Old Beau is described by Miss Mitford in a tale entitled *An Admiral on Shore.*

Admiral Floyd, for so she calls him, had recently come with his wife to reside in the neighbourhood, and it was when paying a call upon them in their new home—a fine old mansion standing in beautiful grounds, known as the White House at Hannonby—that she first made his acquaintance.

" I had been proceeding to call on our new neighbours," writes Miss Mitford, " when a very unaccountable noise induced me to pause at the entrance ; a moment's observation explained the nature of the sound. The Admiral was

shooting wasps with a pocket pistol. . . . There under the shade of tall elms sat the veteran, a little old withered man, very like a pocket pistol himself, brown, succinct, grave and fiery. He wore an old-fashioned naval uniform of blue, faced with white, which set off his mahogany countenance, drawn into a thousand deep wrinkles. . . . At his side stood a very tall, masculine, large-boned, middle-aged woman, something like a man in petticoats, whose face, in spite of a quantity of rouge and a small portion of modest assurance, might still be called handsome, and could never be mistaken for belonging to other than an Irish woman. . . . A younger lady was watching them at a little distance apparently as much amused as myself. On her advancing to meet me the pistol was put down and the Admiral joined us. We were acquainted in a moment, and before the end of my visit he had shown me all over his house and told me the whole history of his life and adventures.

" At twelve years old he was sent to sea, and had remained there ever since till now, when an unlucky promotion had sent him ashore and seemed likely to keep him there. I never saw a man so unaffectedly displeased with his own title.

" Being, however, on land, his first object was

to make his residence as much like a man-of-war as possible, or rather as much like that beau-ideal of a habitation, his last frigate, the *Mermaiden,* in which he had by different prizes made above sixty thousand pounds. By that standard his calculations were regulated. All the furniture of the White House at Hannonby was adapted to the proportions of His Majesty's ship the *Mermaiden.* The great drawing-room was fitted up exactly on the model of her cabin, and the whole of that spacious and commodious mansion made to resemble as much as possible that wonderfully inconvenient abode, the inside of a ship ; everything crammed into the smallest possible compass, space most unnecessarily economized and contrivances devised for all those matters which need no contriving at all. He victualled the house as for an East India voyage, served out the provisions in rations, and swung the whole family in hammocks.

" It will easily be believed that these innovations in a small village in a Midland county, where nineteen-twentieths of the inhabitants had never seen a piece of water larger than Hannonby great pond, occasioned no small commotion. The poor Admiral had his own troubles ; at first every living thing about the place rebelled—there was a general mutiny ; the very cocks and hens, whom he had crammed

up in coops in the poultry yard, screamed aloud for liberty; and the pigs, ducks and geese, equally prisoners, squeaked and gabbled for water; the cows lowed in their stall; the sheep bleated in their pens; the whole livestock of Hannonby was in durance.

"The most unmanageable of these complainers were, of course, the servants; with the men, after a little while, he got on tolerably, sternness and grog (the wind and sun of the fable) conquered them. His staunchest opponents were of the other sex, the whole tribe of housemaids and kitchenmaids abhorred him to a woman, and plagued and thwarted him every hour of the day. He, on his part, returned their aversion with interest; talked of female stupidity, female awkwardness and female dirt, and threatened to compound an household of the crew of the *Mermaiden* that should shame all the twirlers of mops and brandishers of brooms in the county.

"Especially he used to vaunt the abilities of a certain Bill Jones as the best laundress, sempstress, cook and housemaid in the navy; him he was determined to procure to keep his refractory household in some order; accordingly he wrote to desire his presence, and Bill, unable to resist the summons of his old commander, arrived accordingly. . . .

"The dreaded major-domo turned out to be a smart young sailor of four or five-and-twenty, with an arch smile, a bright, merry eye and a most knowing nod, by no means insensible to female objurgation or indifferent to female charms. The women of the house, particularly the pretty ones, soon perceived their power, and as the Admirable Crichton of His Majesty's ship the *Mermaiden* had amongst his other accomplishments the address completely to govern his master, all was soon in the smoothest track possible. . . . Under his wise direction and discreet patronage a peace was patched up between the Admiral and his rebellious handmaids.

"Soothed, guided and humoured by his trusty adherent, and influenced perhaps by the force of example and the effect of the land breeze which he had never breathed so long before, our worthy veteran soon began to show symptoms of a man of this world. He took to gardening and farming, for which Bill Jones had also a taste, set free his prisoners in the *basse-cour* to the unutterable glorification and crowing of cock and hen and gabbling of goose and turkey, and enlarged his own walk from pacing backwards and forwards in the dining-room, followed by his old shipmates, a Newfoundland dog and a tame goat, into a stroll

round his own grounds, to the great delight of those faithful attendants.

". . . Amongst the country people he soon became popular. They liked the testy little gentleman, who dispensed his beer and grog so bountifully, and talked to them so freely. He would have his own way to be sure, but then he paid for it; besides, he entered into their tastes and amusements, promoted May-games, revels and other country sports, patronized dancing dogs and monkeys and bespoke plays in barns. Above all he had an exceeding partiality for vagrants, strollers, gipsies and such like persons, listened to their tales with a delightful simplicity of belief, pitied them, relieved them, fought their battles at the bench and the vestry, and got into two or three scrapes with constables and magistrates by the activity of his protection.

"Only one counterfeit sailor with a sham wooden leg he found out at a question and, by aid of Bill Jones, ducked in the horse-pond for an impostor, till the unlucky wretch, a thorough landlubber, was nearly drowned, an adventure which turned out the luckiest of his life, he having carried his case to an attorney, who forced the Admiral to pay fifty pounds for the exploit.

"Our good veteran was equally popular

amongst the gentry of the neighbourhood. His own hospitality was irresistible, and his frankness and simplicity, mixed with a sort of petulant vivacity, combined to make him a most welcome relief to the dullness of a country dinner party. He enjoyed society extremely, and even had a spare bed erected for company, moved thereto by an accident which befell the fat rector of Kinton, who, having unfortunately consented to sleep at Hannonby one wet night, had alarmed the whole house, and nearly broken his own neck by a fall from his hammock. . . . His reading was none of the most extensive: *Robinson Crusoe*, the *Naval Chronicle*, Southey's admirable *Life of Nelson* and Smollett's novels formed the greater part of his library, and for other books he cared little.

"For the rest he was a most kind and excellent person, although a little testy and not a little absolute, and a capital disciplinarian, although addicted to the reverse sins of making other people tipsy whilst he kept himself sober, and of sending forth oaths in volleys whilst he suffered none other to swear. He had besides a few prejudices incident to his condition—loved his country to the point of hating all the rest of the world, especially the French, and regarded his own profession with a pride which made him intolerant of every other. To the army he

had an intense and growing hatred, much augmented since victory upon victory had deprived him of the comfortable feeling of scorn. The battle of Waterloo fairly posed him. 'To be sure to have drubbed the French was a fine thing—a very fine thing—no denying that! but why not have fought out the quarrel by sea?'"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MAY-HOUSES

Miss Mitford delighted in all the simple pleasures of country life, and entered into them with the enthusiasm of youth.

On a certain morning in spring-time she and her father set out in their pony-chaise to attend the " Maying " at Bramley.

" Never was a day more congenial to a happy purpose," she writes. " It was a day made for country weddings and dances on the green—a day of dazzling light, of ardent sunshine falling on hedgerows and meadows fresh with spring showers. . . . We passed through the well-known and beautiful scenery of W——[1] Park and the pretty village of M——[2] with a feeling of new admiration, as if we had never before felt their charms. . . . On we passed gaily and happily as far as we knew our way, perhaps a little further, for the place of our destination was new to both of us, when we had the luck, good or bad, to meet with a director in the

[1] Wokefield Park. [2] Mortimer.

person of the butcher of M——. He soon gave us the customary and unintelligible directions as to lanes and turnings, first to the right, then to the left, etc. . . .

"On we went, twisting and turning through a labyrinth of lanes . . . till we came suddenly on a solitary farm-house which had one solitary inmate, a smiling, middle-aged woman, who came to us and offered her services with the most alert civility.

"All her boys and girls were gone to the Maying, she said, and she remained to keep house.

"'The Maying! We are near Bramley then? Is there no carriage road? Where are we?'

"'At Silchester, close to the walls, only half a mile from the church.'

"'At Silchester!' and in ten minutes we had said a thankful farewell to our kind informant, had retraced our steps a little, had turned up another lane, and found ourselves at the foot of that commanding spot which antiquaries call the amphitheatre, close under the walls of the Roman city."

Miss Mitford has written the following lines on this striking scene:—

"Firm as rocks thy ruins stand
And hem around thy fertile land;
That land where once a city fair
Flourished and pour'd her thousands there:

Where now the waving cornfields glow
And trace thy wide streets as they grow.
Ah! chronicle of ages gone,
Thou dwellest in thy pride alone."

"Under the walls," she continues, "I [met] an old acquaintance, the schoolmaster of Silchester, who happened to be there in his full glory, playing the part of cicerone to a party of ladies, and explaining far more than he knows, or than anyone knows of streets and gates and sites of temples, which, by the way, the worthy pedagogue usually calls parish churches. I never was so glad to see him in my life, never thought he could have spoken with so much sense and eloquence as were comprised in the two words 'straight forward,' by which he answered our enquiry as to the road to Bramley.

"And forward we went by a way beautiful beyond description, and left the venerable walls behind us. . . . But I must loiter on the road no longer. Our various delays of a broken bridge—a bog—another wrong turning—and a meeting with a loaded waggon in a lane too narrow to pass—all this must remain untold.

"At last we reached a large farm-house at Bramley; another mile remained to the Green, but that was impassable. Nobody thinks of riding at Bramley. . . . We must walk, but the appearance of gay crowds of rustics, all

passing along one path, gave assurance that this time we should not lose our way. . . . Cross two fields more and up a quiet lane and we are at the Maying, announced afar off by the merry sound of music and the merrier clatter of childish voices. Here we are at the Green, a little turfy spot where three roads meet, close, shut in by hedgerows, with a pretty white cottage and its long slip of a garden at one angle. . . . In the midst grows a superb horse-chestnut in the full glory of its flowery pyramids, and from the trunk of this chestnut the May-houses commence. They are covered alleys built of green boughs, decorated with garlands and great bunches of flowers—the gayest that blow—lilacs, guelder roses, peonies, tulips, stocks—hanging down like chandeliers among the dancers; for of dancers, gay, dark-eyed young girls in straw bonnets and white gowns, and their lovers in their Sunday attire, the May-houses were full. The girls had mostly the look of extreme youth, and danced well and quietly like ladies—too much so. . . . Outside was the fun. It is the outside, the upper gallery of the world that has that good thing. There were children laughing, eating, trying to cheat and being cheated round an ancient and practised vender of oranges and ginger-bread; and on the other side of the tree lay a merry

group of old men. . . . That group would have suited Teniers; it smoked and drank a little, but it laughed a great deal more. There were . . . young mothers strolling about with infants in their arms, and ragged boys peeping through the boughs at the dancers, and the bright sun shining gloriously on all this innocent happiness. Oh, what a pretty sight it was—worth losing our way for!"

We hear of another Maying which took place in a neighbouring hamlet of "Our Village," which Miss Mitford calls Whitley Wood, into which narrative is interwoven an amusing account of the love affairs of mine host of the "Rose"—the village inn hard by the Mitfords' cottage.

"Landlord Sims, the master of the revels," writes Miss Mitford, "and our very good neighbour, is a portly, bustling man of five-and-forty or thereabout, with a hale, jovial visage, a merry eye, a pleasant smile and a general air of good-fellowship. . . . There is not a better companion or a more judicious listener in the county. . . . No one can wonder at Master Sim's popularity.

"After his good wife's death this popularity began to extend itself in a remarkable manner amongst the females of the neighbourhood. [His] Betsy and Letty were good little girls,

quick, civil and active, yet, poor things, what could such young girls know of a house like the 'Rose'? All would go to rack and ruin without the eye of a mistress! Master Sims must look out for a wife. So thought the whole female world, and apparently Master Sims began to think so himself.

OLD SHOEING FORGE

"The first fair one to whom his attention was directed was a rosy, pretty widow, a pastry-cook of the next town who arrived in our village on a visit to her cousin the baker for the purpose of giving confectionery lessons to his wife. Nothing was ever so hot as that courtship. During the week that the lady of pie-crust

stayed, her lover almost lived in the oven. . . . It would be a most suitable match, as all the parish agreed. . . . And when our landlord carried her back to B—— in his new-painted green cart all the village agreed that they were gone to be married, and the ringers were just setting up a peal when Master Sims returned alone, single, crestfallen, dejected; the bells stopped of themselves, and we heard no more of the pretty pastry-cook. For three months after that rebuff mine host, albeit not addicted to assertions, testified an equal dislike to women and tartlets, widows and plum-cake. . . .

"The fit, however, wore off in time, and he began again to follow the advice of his neighbours and to look out for a wife, up street and down street. . . . The down-street lady was a widow also, the portly, comely relict of our drunken village blacksmith, who began to find her shop, her journeymen and her eight children . . . rather more than a lone woman could manage, and to sigh for a helpmate to ease her of her cares. . . . Master Sims was the coadjutor on whom she had inwardly pitched, and accordingly she threw out broad hints to that effect every time she encountered him . . . and Mr. Sims was far too gallant and too much in the habit of assenting to listen unmoved . . . and the whispers and smiles and hand-pressings

were becoming very tender. . . . This was his down-street flame.

"The rival lady was Miss Lydia Day, the carpenter's sister, a slim, upright maiden, not remarkable for beauty and not quite so young as she had been, who, on inheriting a small annuity from the mistress with whom she had spent the best of her days, retired to her native village to live on her means. A genteel, demure, quiet personage was Miss Lydia Day, much addicted to snuff and green tea, and not averse to a little gentle scandal—for the rest a good sort of woman and *un très bon parti* for Master Sims, who . . . made love to her whenever she came into his head. . . . Remiss as he was, he had no lack of encouragement to complain of—for she . . . put on her best silk, and her best simper, and lighted up her faded complexion into something approaching a blush whenever he came to visit her. And this was Master Sims' up-street love.

"So stood affairs at the 'Rose' when the day of the Maying arrived, and the double flirtation . . . proved on this occasion extremely useful. Each of the ladies contributed her aid to the festival, Miss Lydia by tying up sentimental garlands for the May-house . . . the widow by giving her whole bevy of boys and girls a holiday and turning them loose in

the neighbourhood to collect flowers as they could. Very useful auxiliaries were these eight foragers ; they scoured the country far and near —irresistible mendicants, pardonable thieves !

" . . . By the time a cricket match [which opened proceedings] was over the world began to be gay at Whitley Wood. Carts and gigs and horses and carriages and people of all sorts arrived from all quarters. . . . Fiddlers, ballad-singers, cake, baskets—Punch—Master Frost crying cherries—a Frenchman with dancing dogs—a Bavarian woman selling brooms—half a dozen stalls with fruit and frippery—and twenty noisy games of quoits and bowls and ninepins gave to the assemblage the bustle, clatter and gaiety of a Dutch fair. Plenty of eating in the booths . . . and landlord Sims bustling everywhere, assisted by the little light-footed maidens, his daughters, all smiles and curtsies, and by a pretty black-eyed young woman—name unknown—with whom, even in the midst of his hurry, he found time, as it seemed to me, for a little philandering. What would the widow and Miss Lydia have said ? But they remained in happy ignorance—the one drinking tea in most decorous primness in a distant marquee, the other in full chase after the most unlucky of all her urchins.

" Meanwhile the band struck up in the May-

house, and the dance, after a little dinner, was fairly set afloat—an honest English country dance—with ladies and gentlemen at the top and country lads and lassies at the bottom ; a happy mixture of cordial kindness on the one hand and pleased respect on the other. It was droll though to see the beplumed and beflowered French hats, the silks and the furbelows sailing and rustling amidst the straw bonnets and cotton gowns of the humbler dancers.

"Well! the dance finished, the sun went down, and we departed. The Maying is over, the booths carried away and the May-house demolished. Everything has fallen into its old position except the love affairs of landlord Sims. The pretty lass with the black eyes, who first made her appearance at Whitley Wood, is actually staying at the Rose Inn on a visit to his daughters, and the village talk goes that she is to be the mistress of that thriving hostelry and the wife of its master. . . . Nobody knows exactly who the black-eyed damsel may be—but she's young and pretty and civil and modest, and without intending to depreciate the merits of either of her competitors, I cannot help thinking that our good neighbour has shown his taste."

CHAPTER XXXIII

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY

THE above title is given to many a delightful ramble to which Mary Russell Mitford takes her readers.

Writing one day in the month of June, she exclaims: "What a glowing, glorious day! Summer in its richest prime, noon in its most sparkling brightness, little white clouds dappling the deep blue sky, and the sun, now partially veiled and now bursting through them with an intensity of light. . . . We are going to drive to the old house at Aberleigh, to spend a morning under the shade of those balmy firs and amongst those luxuriant rose trees and by the side of that brimming Loddon river.

"'Do not expect us before six o'clock,' said I as I left the house.

"'Six at soonest,' added my charming companion, and off we drove in our little pony-chaise drawn by an old mare, and with the good-humoured urchin, Henry's successor, who takes care of horse and chaise, and cow and garden for our charioteer.

"My comrade . . . Emily is a person whom it is a privilege to know. She is quite like a creation of the older poets, and might pass for one of Shakespeare's or Fletcher's women

BRIDGE ON THE LODDON

stepped into life; just as tender, as playful, as gentle and as kind. . . .

"But here we are at the bridge! Here we must alight! 'This is the Loddon, Emily. Is

it not a beautiful river? rising level with its banks, so clear and smooth and peaceful . . . bearing on its pellucid stream the snowy water-lily, the purest of flowers, which sits enthroned on its own cool leaves looking chastity itself, like the lady in Comus. . . . We must dismount here and leave Richard to take care of our equipage under the shade of these trees whilst we walk up to the house. See, there it is! We must cross this stile, there is no other way now.

"And crossing the stile we were immediately . . . in full view of the Great House, a beautiful structure of James the First time, whose glassless windows and dilapidated doors form a melancholy contrast with the strength and entireness of the rich and massive front. The story of that ruin—for such it is—is always to me singularly affecting. It is that of the decay of an ancient and distinguished family gradually reduced from the highest wealth and station to actual poverty. . . . But here we are in the smooth, grassy ride on the top of a steep turfy slope descending to the river, crowned with enormous firs and limes of equal growth, looking across the winding waters into a sweet, peaceful landscape of quiet meadows, shut in by distant woods. What a fragrance is in the air from the balmy fir trees and the blossomed limes!

What an intensity of odour! And what a murmur of bees in the lime trees! And what a pleasant sound it is! the pleasantest of busy sounds, that which comes associated with all that is good and beautiful—industry and forecast, and sunshine and flowers.

"Emily exclaimed in admiration as we stood under the deep, strong, leafy shadow and still more . . . when roses, really trees, almost intercepted our passage.

"'On, Emily! farther yet! Force your way by that jessamine—it will yield; I will take care of this stubborn white rose bough.' . . . After we won our way through that strait, at some expense of veils and flounces, she stopped to contemplate and admire the tall, graceful shrub whose long, thorny stems, spreading in every direction, had opposed our progress, and now waved those delicate clusters over our heads. . . . 'What an exquisite fragrance!' she exclaimed, 'and what a beautiful flower! so pale and white and tender, and the petals thin and smooth as silk! What rose is it?'

"'Don't you know? Did you never see it before? It is rare now, I believe, and seems rarer than it is because it only blossoms in very hot summers; but this, Emily, is the musk-rose—that very musk-rose of which Titania talks, and which is worthy of Shakespeare and of her.'"

Having reached some steps that led to a square summer-house, formerly a banqueting-hall with a boat-house beneath it, they were soon close to the old mansion. "But it looked sad and desolate," remarks Miss Mitford, "and the entrance, choked with brambles and nettles, seemed almost to repel our steps."

Later on a halt was made on the further side of the river for "Emily" to take a sketch, and this entailed "a delicious walk, when the sun, having gone in, a reviving coolness seemed to breathe over the water," and, lastly, a drive home amid the lengthening shadows. So ended their pleasant jaunt.

The old house known now as Arborfield House was rebuilt some years after Miss Mitford knew it. The style is, of course, quite modern, but the beautiful grounds, with their magnificent trees and the river winding through them, remain unchanged, together with the luxuriant flower gardens, but which are now carefully tended. We have wandered through those grounds and have seen the poplars and acacias and firs gracefully blending their foliage together as she has described them.

Miss Mitford had a decided liking for gipsies, and they often figure in her village stories. "There is nothing under the sun," she writes, "that harmonizes so well with nature, especi-

IN ABERLEIGH PARK

ally in her woodland recesses, as that picturesque people who are, so to say, the wild genus—the pheasants and roebucks of the human race."

In one of these tales, after describing a spot of singularly wild beauty some miles distant from her home, where a dark deep pool lay beneath the shade of great trees, she says :—

" In this lovely place I first saw our gipsies. They had pitched their little tent under one of the oak trees. . . . The party consisted only of four—an old crone in a tattered red cloak and black bonnet who was stooping over a kettle of which the contents were probably as savoury as that of Meg Merrilees, renowned in story ; a pretty black-eyed girl at work under the trees ; a sunburnt urchin of eight or nine, collecting sticks and dead leaves to feed their out-of-door fire ; and a slender lad two or three years older, who lay basking in the sun, with a couple of shabby dogs of the sort called mongrel in all the joy of idleness, whilst a grave, patient donkey stood grazing hard by. It was a pretty picture, with its soft autumnal sky, its rich woodiness, its sunshine, its verdure, the light smoke curling from the fire, and the group disposed around so harmless poor outcasts ! and so happy—a beautiful picture ! I stood gazing at it till I was half ashamed to look

longer, and came away half afraid that they should depart before I could see them again.

"This fear I soon found to be groundless. The old gipsy was a celebrated fortune-teller. . . . The whole village rang with the predictions of this modern Cassandra. . . . I myself could not help admiring the real cleverness, the genuine gipsy tact with which she adapted her foretellings to the age, the habits and the known desires and circumstances of her clients.

"To our little pet Lizzie, for instance, a damsel of seven, she predicted a fairing; to Ben Kirby, a youth of thirteen, head batter of the boys, a new cricket ball; to Ben's sister Lucy, a girl some three years his senior, a pink top-knot; whilst for Miss Sophia Matthews, an old-maidish schoolmistress . . . she foresaw one handsome husband; and for the smart widow Simmons two, etc. etc.

"No wonder that all the world—that is to say all our world—were crazy to have their fortunes told—to enjoy the pleasure of hearing from such undoubted authority that what they wished to be should be. Amongst the most eager to take a peep into futurity was our pretty maid Harriet; although her desire took the not unusual form of disclamation, 'nothing should induce her to have her fortune told, nothing upon earth!' 'She never thought of

the gipsy, not she!' and to prove the fact she said so at least twenty times a day. Now Harriet's fortune seemed told already; her destiny was fixed. She, the belle of the village, was engaged, as everybody knows, to our village beau Joel Brent; they were only waiting for a little more money to marry. . . . But Harriet, besides being a beauty, was a coquette, and her affections for her betrothed did not interfere with certain flirtations which came like Isabella 'by the by,' and occasionally cast a shadow of coolness between the lovers. There had probably been a little fracas in the present instance, for she [remarked] 'that none but fools believed in gipsies; that Joel had had his fortune told and wanted to treat her to a prophecy, but she was not such a simpleton.'

"About half an hour after the delivery of this speech I happened, when tying up a chrysanthemum, to go to our wood yard for a stick of proper dimensions and there, enclosed between the faggot pile and the coal shed, stood the gipsy in the very act of palmistry, conning the lines of fate in Harriet's hand. . . . She was listening too intently to see me, but the fortune-teller did, and stopped so suddenly that her attention was awakened and the intruder discovered.

"Harriet at first meditated a denial. She

called up a pretty unconcerned look, answered my silence (for I never spoke a word) by muttering something about 'coals for the parlour,' and catching up my new-painted green watering-pot instead of the coal-scuttle began filling it with all her might . . . [while making] divers signs to the gipsy to decamp. The old sybil, however, budged not a foot, influenced probably by two reasons, one the hope of securing a customer in the new-comer, whose appearance is generally, I am afraid, the very reverse of dignified, rather merry than wise, the other a genuine fear of passing through the yard gate on the outside of which a much more imposing person, my greyhound Mayflower, who has a sort of beadle instinct anent drunkards and pilferers and disorderly persons of all sorts, stood barking most furiously.

" . . . But the fair consulter of destiny, who had by this time recovered from the shame of her detection, extricated us from our dilemma by smuggling the old woman away through the house.

" Of course, Harriet was exposed to some raillery and a good deal of questioning about her future fate, as to which she preserved an obstinate but evidently satisfied silence. At the end of three days, however, [the prescribed period] when all the family except herself had

forgotten the story, our pretty soubrette, half bursting with the long retention, took the opportunity of lacing on my new half-boots to reveal the prophecy. 'She was to see within the week, and this was Saturday, the young man, the real young man, whom she was to marry.'

"'Why, Harriet, you know, poor Joel.'

"'Joel indeed! the gipsy said that the young man, the real young man, was to ride up to the house dressed in a dark great-coat (and Joel never wore a great-coat in his life—all the world knew that he wore smock-frocks and jackets) and mounted on a white horse—and where should Joel get a white horse?'

"'Had this real young man made his appearance yet?'

"'No; there had not been a white horse past the place since Tuesday; so it must certainly be to-day.'

"A good look-out did Harriet keep for white horses during this fateful Saturday, and plenty did she see. It was the market day at B——, and team after team came by with one, two and three white horses; cart after cart and gig after gig, each with a white steed; Colonel M——'s carriage, with its prancing pair—but still no horseman. At length one appeared, but he had a great-coat whiter than the animal he

rode ; another, but he was old farmer Lewington, a married man ; a third, but he was little Lord L——, a schoolboy on his Arabian pony. Besides, they all passed the house. . . .

" At last, just at dusk, just as Harriet, making believe to close our casement shutters, was taking her last peep up the road something white appeared in the distance coming leisurely down the hill. Was it really a horse ? Was it not rather Titus Strong's cow driving home to milking ? A minute or two dissipated that fear ; it certainly was a horse, and as certainly it had a dark rider. Very slowly he descended the hill, pausing most provokingly at the end of the village, as if about to turn up the Vicarage lane. He came on, however, and after another short stop at the ' Rose,' rode full up to our little gate, and catching Harriet's hand as she was opening the wicket, displayed to the half-pleased, half-angry damsel the smiling, triumphant face of her own Joel Brent, equipped in a new great-coat and mounted on his master's newly purchased market nag. Oh, Joel ! Joel ! The gipsy ! the gipsy ! "

CHAPTER XXXIV

A CENTRE OF INTEREST

As Mary Russell Mitford's fame as a writer began to spread wider and wider her cottage became a centre of interest and attraction to all those who had learnt to love her works. Her chief biographer[1]—a contemporary—writes:

"In the summer time when she gave strawberry parties, the road leading to the cottage was crowded with the carriages of all the rank and fashion in the county. By example as well as precept she 'brightened the path along which she dwelt.' Her kindly nature did not exhaust itself in a girlish enthusiasm for pets and flowers, but went forth to meet her fellow-men and women whose virtues seemed to expand and whose faults to vanish at her approach."

Her conversation had a peculiar charm, considered by some "to be even better than her books," delivered, as it was, by a "voice beautiful as a chime of bells."

It was in the year 1847 that Miss Mitford

[1] Rev. A. G. L'Estrange.

first made the acquaintance of Mr. James T. Fields—a distinguished American—both author and publisher—whose " bright, genial, vivacious letters " and " spirited lectures on ' Charles Lamb,' ' Longfellow,' and others " are highly spoken of by contemporaries.

Mr. Fields writes in his interesting book entitled *Yesterday with Authors* :—

" It was a fortunate hour for me when kind-hearted John Kenyon said, as I was leaving his hospitable door in London one summer midnight : ' you must know my friend Miss Mitford. She lives directly in the line of your route to Oxford, and you must call with my card and make her acquaintance.' The day selected for my call at her cottage door happened to be a perfect one in which to begin an acquaintance with the lady of ' Our Village.' She was then living at Three Mile Cross . . . on the high road between Basingstoke and Reading [where] the village street contained the public-house and several small shops near-by. There was also close at hand the village pond full of ducks and geese, and I noticed several young rogues on their way to school were occupied in worrying their feathered friends. The windows of the cottage were filled with flowers, and cowslips and violets were plentifully scattered about the little garden. I remember the room

into which I was shown was sanded, and a quaint old clock behind the door was marking off the hour in small but loud pieces. The cheerful lady called to me from the head of the stairs to come up into her sitting-room. I sat down by the open window to converse with her, and it was pleasant to see how the village children, as they went by, stopped to bow and curtsy. One curly-headed urchin made bold to take off his well-worn cap, and waited to be recognized as 'little Johnny.' 'No great scholar,' said the kind-hearted lady to me, 'but a sad rogue among our flock of geese. Only yesterday the young marauder was detected by my maid with a plump gosling stuffed half-way into his pocket!' While she was thus discoursing of Johnny's peccadilloes, the little fellow looked up with a knowing expression, and very soon caught in his cap a gingerbread dog which she threw to him from the window. 'I wish he loved his book as well as he relishes sweet cakes,' she sighed, as the boy kicked up his heels and disappeared down the lane. . . .

"From that day our friendship continued, and during other visits to England I saw her frequently, driving about the country with her in her pony-chaise and spending many happy hours in the new cottage which she afterwards occupied at Swallowfield.

"... She was always cheerful and her talk is delightful to remember. From girlhood she had known and been intimate with most of the prominent writers of her time, and her observations and reminiscences were so shrewd and pertinent that I have scarcely known her equal.

"When she talked of Munden and Bannister and Fawcett and Emery, those delightful old actors for whom she had such an exquisite relish, she said they had made comedy to her a living art full of laughter and tears. How often have I heard her describe John Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Miss O'Neil and Edmund Kean, as they were wont to electrify the town in her girlhood! With what gusto she reproduced Elliston, who was one of her prime favourites, and tried to make me, through her representation of him, feel what a spirit there was in the man. ...

"I well remember, one autumn evening, when half a dozen friends were sitting in her library after dinner, talking with her of Tom Taylor's life of Haydon, then lately published, how graphically she described to us the eccentric painter whose genius she was among the foremost to recognize. The flavour of her discourse I cannot reproduce; but I was too much interested in what she was saying to forget the main incidents she drew for our edification

during those pleasant hours now far away in the past."

William Howett had paid a visit to the cottage at Three Mile Cross in the late summer of 1835, which he described in an article that appeared in the *Athenæum*. As he drove from Reading he says :—

" The sound of the sheep bells came pleasantly from the pastures where the eye ranged over wide level fields cleared of their corn and all the wayside was hung with such heavy and jetty clusters of blackberries as scarcely ever were seen in another place. . . . And now I came to the sweetest lanes branching off right and left under trees that met across them and lo! 'Three Mile Cross!' 'But which is Miss Mitford's cottage?' That was the question I asked of two women that stood in the street. 'Oh, sir, you've passed it. It is where that green bush hangs over the wall.' I knocked and who came but Ben Kirby and no other, and who quickly presented herself but Mary Russell Mitford! The very person that every reader must suppose her to be, the sunny-spirited, cordial-hearted, frank, kind, unaffected, genuine, English lady.

" We had known each other before, though we had never seen each other, and we shook hands as old true friends should do ; and in the next

moment passed through that 'nut-shell of a house' (her own true expression) into a perfect paradise of flowers, and flowering fragrance. We passed along the garden into the conservatory, and found her father Dr. Mitford, the worthy magistrate, and two accomplished ladies her friends.

"Now, if anyone should ask me to describe more particularly this place what can I say but that it is most graphically described by the writer herself? Has she not told you that her garden is her great delight? Has she not told you that in summer she and her honoured father live principally in the conservatory (a 'rural arcade' as she calls it) and is it not so? And is it not a sweet summer abode with that glowing, odorous bee-haunted garden all lying before it?

"As we drove [later] along those umbrageous lanes, and crossed the sweet pastoral Loddon, she stayed her pony phaeton [at times] to admire some goodly house, or picturesque parsonage, [and I noticed that] every rustic face we met brightened into smiles, and for every one she had a counter smile, or a kind passing word. Everything you see of her only shows how truly she has spread the vitality of her heart over her pages, and everything you see of the country with what accuracy she sketches."

Mary was much pleased and touched by this graceful and warm-hearted account by Mr. Howett of his visit to Three Mile Cross, and she wrote to him on the subject.

In his answer, written at Nottingham, after expressing his great satisfaction at her pleasure, he goes on to say: "I shall send you a paper to-morrow containing the account of the great cricket match played here between Sussex and Nottingham. . . . We wished you had been there—a more animated sight of the kind you never saw. . . .

"I could not help seeing what a wide difference twenty years has produced in the character of the English population. What a contrast in this play to bull-baiting and cock-fighting! So orderly, so manly, so generous in its character. . . . A sport that has no drawback of cruelty or vulgarity in it, but has every recommendation of skill, taste, health and generous rivalry. You, dear Miss Mitford," he continues, "have done a great deal to promote this better spirit, and you could not have done more had you been haranguing Parliament, and bringing in bills for the purpose."

There are many letters extant from Mary Howett to Miss Mitford, and we should like to give the following written in February, 1836: "This new edition of *Our Village* I have been

coveting ever since I saw the advertisement of it, and I will tell you why. It is one of those cheerful, spirited works, full of fair pictures of humanity which, especially when there are children who love reading, and being read to, becomes a household book, turned to again and again, and remembered and talked of with affection. So it is by our fireside, it is a work our little daughter has read and loves to read, and which our little son Alfred, a most indomitable young gentleman, likes especially. . . . He is as yet a bad reader and therefore he is read to; and his cry is 'Read me the *Copse!*' or 'Read me the *Nutting*,' or a '*Ramble into the Country!*'

"Such, dear Miss Mitford, being the case when I saw the new edition advertised, I began to cast in my mind whether or not we could buy it, for perhaps you know that *literary* people, though *makers* of books, are not exclusive *buyers* thereof, you may think then what was my delight—and the delight of us all—when a parcel came in, the string was cut, and behold it contained no other than those long-coveted and favourite volumes! Thank you, therefore, dearest Miss Mitford; you have conferred a benefit upon our fireside which will make you even more beloved than formerly, for now we shall always have you at hand."

Miss Mitford held communion either personally or by correspondence with several warm-hearted Americans, besides her friend Mr. James T. Fields.

George Ticknor, the celebrated author of *The History of Spanish Literature*, and a partner in Mr. Fields' publishing firm, when on a visit to England in 1835, made a pilgrimage with his family to Three Mile Cross. He writes in his diary of this visit :—

"We found Miss Mitford living literally in a cottage neither *ornée* nor poetical, except inasmuch as it had a small garden, crowded with the richest and most beautiful profusion of flowers. She has the simplest and kindest manners, and entertained us for two hours with the most animated conversation, and a great variety of anecdote, without any of the pretensions of an author by profession, and without any of the stiffness that generally belongs to single ladies of her age and reputation."

Writing to her afterwards he says: "We shall none of us ever forget the truly delightful evening we spent in your cottage at 'Our Village.'"

Daniel Webster, the orator and patriot so greatly valued in the United States, also made his appearance in Three Mile Cross, together

with some members of his family, in their transit from Oxford to Windsor.

"My local position between these two points of attraction," writes Mary, "has often procured for me the gratification of seeing my American friends when making that journey; but during *this* visit a little circumstance occurred so characteristic, so graceful, and so gracious that I cannot resist the temptation of relating it.

"Walking in my cottage garden we talked naturally of the roses and pinks that surrounded us, and of the different indigenous flowers of our island and of the United States. . . . We spoke of the primrose and the cowslip immortalized by Shakespeare and by Milton; and the sweet-scented violets, both white and purple of our hedgerows and our lanes; that known as the violet [yellow] being, I suspect, the little wild pansy (viola tricolor) renowned as the love-in-idleness of Shakespeare's famous compliment to Queen Elizabeth. . . . I expressed an interest in two flowers known to me only by the vivid descriptions of Miss Martineau; the scarlet lily of New York and of the Canadian woods, and the original gentian of Niagara. I observed that our illustrious guest made some remark to one of the ladies of his party; but I little expected that so soon

after his return as seeds of these plants could be procured, I should receive a packet of each, signed and directed by his own hand. How much pleasure these little kindnesses give! And how many such have come to me from over the same wide ocean!"

On New Year's Day, 1830, Mrs. Mitford died after a short illness. An affecting account of her last hours was written by her daughter, in which she says: "No human being was ever so devoted to her duties—so just, so pious, so charitable, so true, so feminine, so generous. . . . Never thinking of herself, the most devoted wife and the most faithful friend. She died in a good old age, universally beloved and respected."

Mrs. Mitford was buried in Shinfield Church—the parish church of Three Mile Cross and the other surrounding villages where the Mitfords used to worship. We have visited the place, which does not seem to have changed much since Miss Mitford described it in one of her village stories.

She speaks of "the tower of the old village church fancifully ornamented with brick-work, and of the churchyard planted with broad flowering limes and funereal yew-trees, also of a short avenue of magnificent oaks leading up to the church.

"It stands," she says, "amidst a labyrinth of green lanes running through a hilly and richly wooded country whose valleys are threaded by the silver Loddon."

In the month of June of this same year Mary received an interesting letter from the American authoress, Miss Sedgwick, whose works, especially those for children, were much read in this country some years ago.

"You cannot," she remarks, "be ignorant that your books are re-printed and widely circulated on this side of the Atlantic, but . . . it is probably difficult for you to realize that your name has penetrated beyond our maritime cities, and is familiar and honoured and loved through many a village circle, and to the borders of the lonely depths of unpierced woods—that we venerate 'Mrs. Mosse' and are lovers of 'Sweet Cousin Mary' . . . and, in short, that your pictures have wrought on our affections like realities.

" . . . My niece, a child of nine years old, who is sitting by me, not satisfied with requesting that her *love* may be sent to Miss Mitford, has boldly aspired to the honour of addressing a postscript to her, and I . . . not forgetting who has allowed us a precedent for spoiling children, have consented to her wishes. Forgive us both, dear Miss Mitford."

In her little letter the child asks after the various characters in the stories that have taken her fancy, not forgetting the pretty greyhound Mayflower.

Miss Mitford responds in the following way :—

" My dear young friend,

" I am very much obliged to you for your kind enquiries respecting the people in my book. It is much to be asked about by a little lady on the other side of the Atlantic, and we are very proud of it accordingly. ' May ' was a real greyhound, and everything told of her was literally true ; but alas ! she is no more. . . . ' Harriet ' and ' Joel ' are not married yet ; you shall have the very latest intelligence of her. I am expecting two or three friends to dinner and she is making an apple-tart and custards—which I wish with all my heart that you and your dear aunt were coming to partake of. The rest of the people are all doing well in their several ways, and I am always, my dear little girl,

" Most sincerely yours,

" M. R. MITFORD."

CHAPTER XXXV

A LONDON WELCOME

In the spring of 1836 Miss Mitford paid a short visit to London. She stayed in the house of her father's old friend Sergeant Talfourd, No. 56 Russell Square. Her stories were so well known by this time, and so universally admired, that she received quite an ovation from the literary world. Dinners and receptions were given in her honour, and she had the pleasure of meeting many a writer whose works she valued highly but whose personality was hitherto unknown to her.

Amongst these was the poet Wordsworth. Writing to her father on May 26th she says :—

"Mr. Wordsworth, Mr. Landor and Mr. White dined here. I like Mr. Wordsworth of all things ; he is a most venerable-looking old man, delightfully mild and placid, and most kind to me" ; and again she writes : "You cannot imagine how very very kindly Mr. Wordsworth speaks of my poor works. You who know what I think of him can imagine

how much I am gratified by his praise." Speaking of the other guests, she says :—

"Mr. Landor is a very striking-looking person, and exceedingly clever. Also we had a Mr. Browning, a young poet (author of *Paracelsus*), and Mr. Proctor and Mr. Chorley, and quantities more of poets, etc. . . . Mr. Willis has sailed for America. Mr. Moore and Miss Edgeworth are not in town. . . .

"There was a curious affair to-night. All the Sergeants went to the play in a body [to see Sergeant Talfourd's *Ion*]. Lord Grey and his family were in a private box just opposite to us, and the house was filled with people of that class, and the pit crammed with gentlemen. Very very gratifying was it not ?"

Writing to her father on May 31st Miss Mitford says :—

"At seven William [Harness] came to take me to Lord Dacre's. It is a small house, with a round table that only holds eight. The company was William, Mrs. Joanna [Baillie], Mrs. Sullivan (Lady Dacre's daughter, the authoress), Lord and Lady Dacre, a famous talker called Bobus Smith (otherwise the great Bobus) and my old friend Mr. Young the actor, who was delighted to see me, and very attentive and kind indeed. But how kind they were all ! . . .

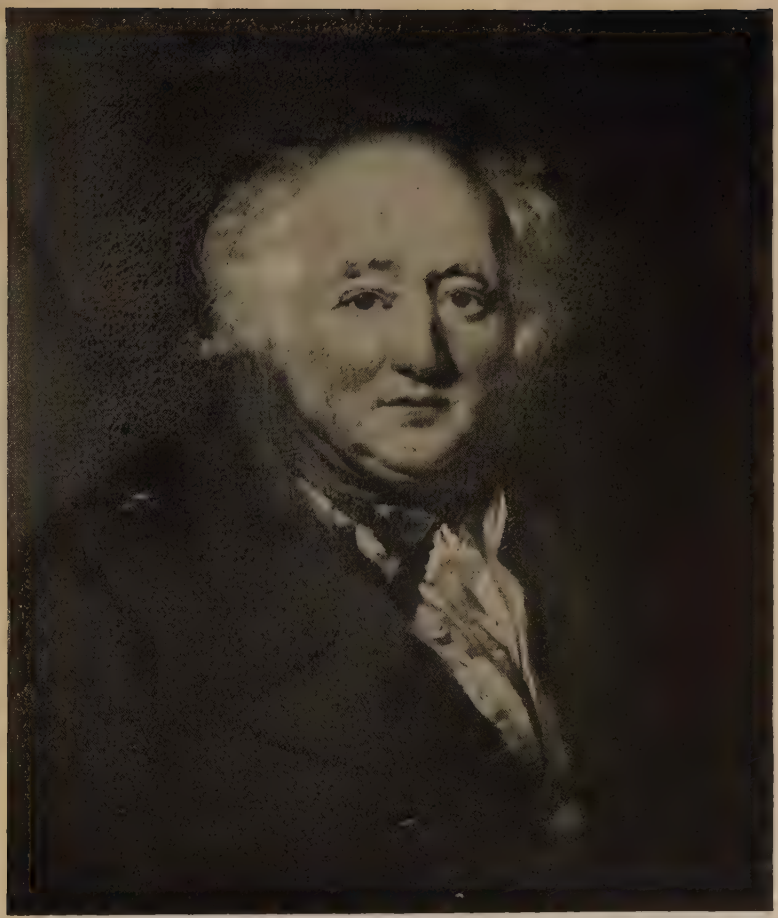
"In the evening we had about fifty people,

amongst others, Edwin Landseer, who invited himself to come and paint Dash. He is a charming person ; recollected me instantly, and talked to me for two whole hours. . . . You may imagine that I was very gracious to the best dog painter that ever lived, who asked my leave to paint Dash. . . . Edwin Landseer says that it is the most beautiful and rarest race of dogs in existence—the dogs who have most intellect and most *countenance.* Stanfield had talked to him of his intention to paint my country, and then Edwin Landseer resolved to paint my dog. . . .

" Edwin Landseer has a fine Newfoundland dog whom he has often painted, and who is content to maintain his posture as long as his master keeps his palette in his hand, however long that may be ; but the moment the palette is laid down off darts Neptune and will sit no more that day. . . .

" It is very odd that Mr. Knight should want to paint *me.* Mr. Lucas will make the most charming picture of all—*of you.*

" I told you, my dearest father, that Mr. Kenyon was to take me to the giraffes and the Diorama, with both of which I was delighted. A sweet young woman whom we called for in Gloucester Place went with us—a Miss Barrett —who reads Greek as I do French, and has



John Lucas

DR. MITFORD

published some translations from Æschylus and some most striking poems. She is a delightful young creature, shy and timid and modest. Nothing but her desire to see me got her out at all, but now she is coming to us to-morrow night also."

Again she writes of her on further acquaintance: "Miss Barrett has translated the most difficult of the Greek plays (the *Prometheus Bound*). If she be spared to the world you will see her passing all women and most men as a narrative and dramatic poet. Our sweet Miss Barrett!—to think of virtue and genius is to think of her. . . . She is so sweet and gentle and so pretty that one looks at her as if she were some bright flower."

The two corresponded afterwards, and their letters are full of interest. We should like to quote a passage from one of Miss Barrett's upon the Greek drama. "The Œdipus is wonderful," she writes, "the sublime truth which pierces through to your soul like lightning seems to me to be the humiliating effect of guilt, even when unconsciously incurred. The abasement, the self-abasement, of the proud, high-minded King before the mean mediocre Creon, not because he is wretched, not because he is blind, but because he is criminal, appears to me a wonderful and most affecting conception. And

there is Euripides with his abandon to the pathetic, and Æschylus who sheds tears like a strong man and moves you to more because you know that his struggle is to restrain them."

Miss Mitford writes to her friend in October of this year (1836) :—

"I have just read your delightful ballad.[1] My earliest book was *Percy's Reliques*, the delight of my childhood, and after them came Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Borders*, the favourite of my youth, so that I am prepared to love ballads, although perhaps a little biassed in favour of great directness and simplicity by the earnest plainness of my old pet. Do read Tennyson's *Ladye of Shalott*. You will be charmed with its spirit and picturesqueness.

"Are you a great reader of the old English drama? I am—preferring it to every other sort of reading; of course, admitting and regretting the grossness of the age, but that from habit one skips without a thought, just as I should over so much Greek or Hebrew which I knew that I could not comprehend. Have you read Victor Hugo's plays? . . . and his *Notre Dame?* I admit the bad taste of these, the excess, but the power and the pathos are to me indescribably great. And then he has broken through the conventional phrases and made the

[1] "The Romaunt of the Page."

French a new language. He has accomplished this partly by going back to the old fountains, Froissart, etc. Again these old chronicles are great books of mine."

Mary Russell Mitford's letters written to intimate friends were at all times a true reflection of her mind and nature, and it is interesting to learn from a passage in her *Recollections of a Literary Life* what her opinion was of the value of letters, "provided they are truthful and spontaneous." "Such is the reality and identity belonging to letters written at the moment," she writes, "and intended only for the eye of a favourite friend, that it is probable that any genuine series of epistles, were the writer ever so little distinguished, would possess the invaluable quality of individuality, a quality which so often causes us to linger before an old portrait of which we know no more than it is a Burgomaster by Rembrandt or a Venetian Senator by Titian. The least skilful pen when flowing from the fullness of the heart, and untroubled by any misgivings of after publication, shall often paint with as faithful and life-like a touch as either of these great masters."

Writing to Miss Barrett of her country rambles in the autumn of 1836 she says: "I was this afternoon for an hour on Heckfield Heath, a common dotted with cottages and a

large piece of water backed by woody hills; the nearer portion of the ground a forest of oak and birch and hawthorn and holly and fern, intersected by grassy glades. . . . On an open space just large enough for the purpose a cricket match was going on,—the older people sitting on benches, the younger ones lying about under the trees; and a party of boys just seen glancing backward and forward in a sunny glade, where they were engaged in an equally merry and far more noisy game. Well, there we stood, Ben and I and Dash, watching and enjoying the enjoyments we witnessed. And I thought if I had no pecuniary anxiety, if my dear father were stronger and our dear friend well[1] I should be the happiest creature in the world, so strong was the influence of that happy scene."

The pecuniary anxiety here referred to had been growing greater and greater. The literary earnings of the devoted daughter seem to have melted away in the father's speculations. At last she was urged by her valued friend William Harness to apply to Government for a pension—an application which was strongly supported by influential friends. Her petition, dated May, 1837, to Lord Melbourne concludes with these words: "I am emboldened to take this step

[1] Miss Barrett's health was causing much anxiety to her friends.

by the sight of my father's white hairs and the certainty that such another winter as the last would take from me all power of literary exertion and send those white hairs with sorrow to the grave."

On the 31st May Miss Mitford writes to her friend Miss Jephson :—

"I cannot suffer one four-and-twenty hours to pass, my own dearest Emily, without telling you what I am sure will give you so much pleasure, that I had to-day an announcement from Lord Melbourne of a pension of £100 a year. The sum is small, but that cannot be considered derogatory, which was the amount given by Sir Robert Peel to Mrs. Hemans and Mrs. Somerville, and it is a great comfort to have something to look forward to as a certainty, however small, in sickness or old age. . . . But the real gratification of this transaction has been the kindness, the warmth of heart, the cordiality and the delicacy of every human being connected with the circumstances. It originated with dear William Harness and that most kind and zealous friend, Lady Dacre ; and the manner in which it was taken up by the Duke of Devonshire, Lord and Lady Holland, Lord and Lady Radnor, Lord Palmerston and many others, some of whom I had never even seen, has been such as to make

this one of the most pleasurable events of my life. . . .

"Is not this very honourable to the kind feelings of our aristocracy? I always knew that I had as a writer a strong hold in that quarter; that they turned with disgust from the trash called fashionable novels to the common life of Miss Austen, the Irish tales of Miss Edgeworth, and my humble village stories; but I did not suspect the strong personal interest which these stories had excited, and I am intensely grateful for it."

Miss Mitford was further cheered in her outlook upon life by an offer to edit an important publication called *Finden's Tableaux*, a large quarto work illustrated by fine steel engravings from the works of the leading artists of the day, and handsomely bound in leather elaborately ornamented—a style then much in vogue. She gladly accepted the offer and was soon applying to Miss Barrett, her "Sweet Love," for a contribution in the shape of a poem. The poem was supplied, bearing the title of "A Romance of the Ganges," and was followed in course of time by many others.

This offer was followed in September, 1836, by a commission from the editors of *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*. "It is one of the signs of the times," writes Miss Mitford, "that a periodi-

cal selling for threepence halfpenny should engage so high-priced a writer as myself ; but they have a circulation of 200,000 or 300,000." This was her passing comment on the transaction, but it was to be of far more lasting importance than she anticipated, resulting as it did in a close friendship with William Chambers, and in a scheme of collaboration in which she took a prominent part.[1]

Mr. William Chambers paid a visit to Three Mile Cross in 1847, when he and Miss Mitford and the latter's warm friend, Mr. Lovejoy, of Reading, talked over a scheme for forming Rural Libraries.

It was on the 31st March, 1836, that *Pickwick* first made its appearance, electrifying the reading world. It came out in monthly numbers, price one shilling. Of the first number, it seems, 400 copies were printed, but by the time it had reached the fifteenth number no less than 40,000 were issued !

Miss Mitford writes to her friend Miss Jephson in June, 1837 :—

" So you never heard of the *Pickwick Papers ?* Well ! . . . It is fun. London life—but without anything unpleasant ; a lady might read it all *aloud ;* and it is so graphic, so individual

[1] See *Life and Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford*, by W. J. Roberts.

and so true that you could curtsy to all the people as you met them in the street. . . . All the boys and girls talk his fun—the boys in the streets ; and yet they who are of the highest taste like it the most. Sir Benjamin Brodie takes it to read in his carriage between patient and patient, and Lord Denman studies *Pickwick* on the bench whilst the jury are deliberating.

" Do take some means to borrow the *Pickwick Papers*. It seems like not having heard of Hogarth, whom he resembles greatly, except that he takes a far more cheerful view, a Shakespearian view, of humanity. It is rather fragmentary except the trial, which is as complete and perfect as any bit of comic writing in the English language. You must read the *Pickwick Papers*."

CHAPTER XXXVI

A BRAVE HEART

Two new works by Mary Russell Mitford had been recently published—*Belford Regis* and *Country Stories*. Belford Regis, as the reader may remember, was her pseudonym for the good town of Reading.

She writes in June, 1835, to Sir William Elford : " I thank you very much, my ever dear and kind friend, for your kind letter, and I rejoice that you like my book. It has been most favourably received and is, I find, reckoned my best ; although when one considers that *Our Village* has passed through fourteen large editions in England and nearly as many in America, one can hardly expect an increase of popularity and has only to hope for an equal success for any future production."

There was a still further proof of the popularity of *Our Village* at this time, as Miss Mitford learnt from a friend travelling in Spain that he had come across a copy of the work translated into Spanish.

Country Stories appeared two years later. She dedicated the work to her valued friend, the Rev. William Harness, "whose old hereditary friendship," she writes, "has been the pride and pleasure of her happiest hours, her consolation in the sorrows and her support in the difficulties of life."

It was to him that she opened her heart on religious matters more than to anyone else, and it is interesting to learn from their correspondence her opinions upon such matters as the question of Church Reform, then beginning to be discussed.

After receiving a volume of Sermons by the Rev. William Harness, she writes :—

"It is a very able and conciliatory plea for the Church. My opinion (if an insignificant woman may presume to give one) is that certain reforms ought to be ; that very gross cases of pluralities should be abolished . . . that some few of the clergy are too rich, and that a great many are too poor. But although not holding all her doctrines, I heartily agree with you that, as an establishment, the Church ought to remain ; for to say nothing of the frightful precedent of sweeping away property, which would not stop there, the country would be overrun with fanatics. . . . But the Church must be (as many of her members are) wisely tolerant.

Bishops must not wage war with theatres, nor rectors with a Sunday evening game of cricket."

Happily reforms in such matters were soon to be brought forward by Charles Kingsley and many others. Charles Kingsley, when he was made Rector of Eversley, was a neighbour of Miss Mitford's and became in time her fast friend.

During the year 1842 Dr. Mitford's health rapidly declined and his devoted daughter was nearly worn out by her constant attendance upon him. He had a strange notion which he held pertinaciously that all outdoor exercise was bad for her, while, in fact, her short strolls in her garden or in the neighbouring fields was the only change that could keep her from breaking down. When after some hours spent in weary watching she had seen her father fall asleep, she would steal out of the house with Dash for a companion for a scamper round the meadows. "How grateful I am," she writes at this time, "to that great gracious Providence who makes the most intense enjoyment the cheapest and the commonest."

Dr. Mitford died on the 11th day of December. He was buried by his wife in Shinfield Church, being followed by an imposing procession of neighbours and friends. We cannot help thinking that this was more to show sympathy and

respect for Miss Mitford than from special respect to him.

That she loved her father dearly in spite of all his faults is very certain, and that she was not blind to these faults is also certain. But she looked upon them at all times very much in the same way as she did when a young girl on hearing of his money losses. "Poor Papa!" she would exclaim, "I am so sorry for him. I wish he would deal with honest people."

A beautiful expression of a dying mother to her children has been handed down in our family, "Cover each other's faults," she said, "with a mantle of love." Miss Mitford did this and perhaps sometimes unwisely, but her life was the happier for it. She never knew the misery of condemning the conduct of her father.

"But her father was not the only person whom Miss Mitford egregiously overestimated, and unconsciously flattered," writes Mrs. Tindal. "She looked upon her friends through rose-coloured spectacles, she exaggerated their good gifts and multiplied their graces; she hoped and believed great things of them."

Dr. Mitford had continued to squander the small means of the household to the last, and so powerless was his daughter to prevent this (without giving him great pain) that she re-

marks in a letter to one with whom she was intimate: "I have to provide for expenses over which I have no more control than my own dog Dash."

When the true state of affairs became known Miss Mitford was faced with a list of liabilities amounting to nearly £1000, but her determination was at once taken that all the creditors should have complete satisfaction. "Everybody shall be paid," she exclaimed, "if I have to sell the gown off my back, or pledge my little pension."

But this could never be allowed. Her friends and admirers were eager to show their desire to help one who, by her beautiful writings and unselfish life, had done so much for the good of humanity. Miss Mitford was astonished and touched by the letters she received. "I only pray God," she writes, "that I may deserve half that has been said of me."

Money was subscribed on all sides, and by the month of March following nearly the whole thousand pounds had already been handed over to her, whilst in addition to this some hundreds of pounds were promised. Many, too, were the acts of kind and unostentatious attention that were showered upon her and which went straight to her heart. Conspicuous among these was the welcome act of her friend Mr.

George Lovejoy, the well-known bookseller of Reading, in supplying her with books. He was a man of considerable learning, and his library was noted from its earliest days for its fine collection of foreign works, which made it especially valuable to Miss Mitford, whose love of French literature was so marked.

Writing to a friend who had offered to lend her some books she explains that she has already seen them. "I have at this moment," she writes, "eight sets of books belonging to Mr. Lovejoy. I have every periodical within a week, often getting them literally the day before publication."

About this time a source of happiness came into Mary Mitford's life in the shape of a little child of two years old, the son of her attached servant K——, whom she soon looked upon as a son of the household, and who as time went on became her constant little companion in her strolls about the country.

A few years later Mary was suffering from an attack of lameness and she had recourse for help to that same "historic staff" whose loss had caused so much bustle and excitement in the village of Three Mile Cross.

"Long before little Henry could open the outer door, there he would stand," she writes, "the stick in one hand, and, if it were summer,

The sedrose is Queen of the garden bower
  That glows in the sun at noon,
And the lady lily's the fairest flower
  That swings her white bells in the breeze of June
But they, who come 'mid pork & flood
  Peeping from bank or boot of tree,
The primrose & the violet bud,—
  They are the dearest flowers to me.

The Nightingale's is the sweetest song
  That ever the ear hath heard;
And when the lark sings the white clouds among
  The lily looks up to the heavenly bird;
But the robin with his eye of jet
  Who pipes from the bare boughs merrily
To the primrose pale & the violet,—
  His is the dearest song to me

M. R. Mitford

Three Mile Cross
July 12th 1847

a flower in the other, waiting for my going out, the pretty Saxon boy with his upright figure, his golden hair, his eyes like two stars, and his bright intelligent smile."

Woodcock lane was a chosen resort where Mary, her servant "the hemmer of flowers," little Henry and the dogs would proceed to a certain green hillock "redolent of wild thyme and a thousand fairy flowers, delicious in its coolness, its fragrance and its repose." Here whilst Mary sat on the turf with pen in hand and paper on knee jotting down her thoughts, she would still keep an eye on the child who was gathering flowers hard by. "Do not gather them all, Henry," she would say, "because some one who has not so many pretty flowers at home as we have may come this way and would like to gather some."

Miss Mitford's many visitors from far and near had all a kindly word for the little lad—Mr. Fields especially was much interested in him.

In the month of January, 1847, when the first volume of *Modern Painters* was just published, Mary Mitford wrote to a friend: "Have you read an English Graduate's *Letters on Art?* The author, Mr. Ruskin, was here last week and is certainly the most charming person I have ever known." In her *Recollections*

of a Literary Life Miss Mitford speaks with admiration of his "boldness" in demolishing old idols and setting up new! "Often," she remarks, "he was right, though sometimes wrong, but always striking, always eloquent, always true to his own convictions. . . . Many passages of *Modern Painters* are really poems in their tenderness, their sentiment and their grandeur.

"But the greatest triumph of Mr. Ruskin," she remarks, "is that long series of cloud pictures, unparalleled, I suppose, in any language, whether painted or written." Here follows a long quotation of which we would give two passages.

"It is a strange thing," writes the author, "how little, in general, people know about the sky. It is the part of creation in which Nature has done more for the sake of pleasing man, more for the sole and evident purpose of talking to him, and teaching him than in any other of his works; and it is just the part in which we least attend to her. . . . The noblest scenes of the earth can be seen and known but by few; it is not intended that man should live always in the midst of them; he injures them by his presence, he ceases to feel them if he be always with them; but the sky is for all; bright as it is, it is not 'too bright nor good for human nature's daily food.' It is fitted in all its

functions for the perpetual comfort, and exalting of the heart, for the soothing it and purifying it from its dross and dust."

The acquaintance with Mr. Ruskin soon ripened into a warm friendship, which was the cause of much happiness to Miss Mitford during the last years of her life. His attentions to her when she was unwell were unremitting either in the way of interesting books to entertain her or of delicacies of the table to tempt her appetite. On one occasion when she was confined to her bed from the effects of a fall, he writes to her: "I do indeed sympathize most deeply in the sorrow (it may without exaggeration be so called) which your present privation must cause you, especially coming in the time of spring—your favourite season. . . . After all though your feet are in the stocks, you have the Silas spirit, and the doors will open in the mid-darkness."

After an important event in his life had occurred in 1848, he writes: "Two months ago I was each day on the point of writing to you to ask for your sympathy—the kindest and keenest sympathy that, I think, ever filled the breadth and depth of an unselfish heart." And then alluding to the Revolution of 1848 he says: "I should be very happy just now but for these wild storm clouds bursting on my

dear Italy and my fair France. My occupation gone and all my earthly treasures . . . perished amidst 'the tumult of the people and the imagining of vain things.' . . . I begin to feel that . . . these are not times for watching clouds or dreaming over quiet waters, that some serious work is to be done, and that the time for endurance has come rather than for meditation, and for hope rather than for happiness. Happy those whose hope, without this severe and tearful rending away of all the props and stability of earthly enjoyments, has been fixed 'where the wicked cease from troubling.' Mine has not; it was based on 'those pillars of the earth' which are astonished at His reproof."[1]

Mary Mitford continued her intimate correspondence with Miss Barrett after the latter's marriage with Robert Browning—which was a source of much happiness to both. She warmly admired Mrs. Barrett Browning's poems, as we have already seen, but Browning's poems were not equally intelligible or attractive to her, and in a letter to a friend she thus quaintly criticizes his style and writing: "I am just reading Robert Browning's Poems," she says, "there is much more in them than I thought to find. . . . He ought to be forced to write journey-work

[1] See Cook's *Life of Ruskin*.

for his daily bread (say for the *Times*) which would make him write clearly."

In the summer of 1847 Hans Andersen was in England. "He is the lion of London this year," writes Miss Mitford. "Dukes, princes, and ministers are all disputing for an hour of his company, and Mr. Boner (his best translator) says that he is quite unspoilt, as simple as a child and with as much poetry in his every-day doings as in his prose. . . . Mr. Boner sent me the other day for dear Patty Lovejoy's album (she is a sweet little girl of eleven years old) an autograph of Spohr's and one of Andersen's. The latter is so pretty that I must transcribe it for you.

"'How blue are the mountains! How blue the sea and the sky! It is the expression of love in three different languages.

H. C. Andersen.'

London, July 16th, 1847."

The Mr. Boner alluded to was a valued friend of Miss Mitford's with whom she corresponded much during the later years of her life.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FAREWELL TO THREE MILE CROSS

WRITING to her American friend Mr. Fields in December, 1848, after a sharp attack of illness, Miss Mitford says: "But I have many alleviations [to my sufferings] in the general kindness of the neighbourhood, the particular goodness of many admirable friends, the affectionate attention of a most attached and affectionate old servant, and above all in my continued interest in books and delight in reading. I love poetry and people as well at sixty as I did at sixteen, and can never be sufficiently grateful to God for having permitted me to retain the two joy-giving faculties of admiration and sympathy, by which we are enabled to escape from the consciousness of our own infirmities into the great works of all ages and the joys and sorrows of our immediate friends." Much as she loved reading, however, Miss Mitford did justice to another source of comfort for women that is open to all, namely needle-work, "that most effectual sedative, that grand soother and

composer of woman's distress," as she truly styles it.

" Is American literature," she asks Mr. Fields, " rich in native biography ? Just have the goodness to mention to me any lives of Americans, whether illustrious or not, that are graphic, minute and outspoken. I delight in French memoirs and English lives, especially such as are either autobiography or made out by diaries and letters ; and America, a young country, with manners as picturesque and unhackneyed as the scenery, ought to be full of such works."

And again she writes later on : " I have been reading the autobiographies of Lamartine and Chateaubriand. . . . What strange beings these Frenchmen are ! Here is M. de Lamartine at sixty, poet, orator, historian and statesman, writing the stories of two ladies—one of them married—who died for love of him ! Think if Mr. Macaulay should announce himself a lady-killer, and put the details not merely into a book but into a feuilleton ! "

Writing to Mrs. Barrett Browning (then in Italy) in March, 1850, she says : " My *Country Stories* are just coming out, to my great contentment, in the ' Parlour Library ' for a shilling, or perhaps ninepence—that being the price of Miss Austen's novels. I delight in this, and have no sympathy with your bemoanings over

American editions. Think of the American editions of my prose. *Our Village* has been reprinted in twenty or thirty places, and *Belford Regis* in almost as many ; and I like it. So do *you*, say what you may.'"

And writing to the same friend a year later, when Miss Mitford's health was improving, she says : "You will wonder to hear that I have again taken pen in hand. It reminds me of Benedick's speech—'When I said I should die a bachelor I never thought to live to be married,' but it is our friend Henry Chorley's fault." And writing to Mr. Fields on the same subject, she says : "After eight years' absolute cessation of composition, Henry Chorley, of the Athenæum, coaxed me last summer into writing for a lady's journal which he is editing for Messrs. Bradbury & Evans, certain Readings of Poetry, old and new, which will, I suppose, form two or three separate volumes when collected. . . . One pleasure will be the doing what justice I can to certain American poets—Mr. Whittier, for instance, whose 'Massachusetts to Virginia' is amongst the finest things ever written . . . and I foresee that day by day our literature will become more mingled with rich, bright novelties from America, not reflections of European brightness but gems all coloured with your own skies and woods and waters. . . .

"I shall cause my book to be immediately forwarded to you, but I don't think it will be ready for a twelvemonth. There is a good deal in it of my own prose, and it takes a wider range than usual of poetry, including much that has never appeared in any of the specimen books."

This work ultimately bore the title of *Recollections of a Literary Life*. It forms delightful reading, for the author has blended with her own recollections of the poets or of the places they have immortalized many interesting experiences of her own life given in her best style of writing. It is a truly remarkable work when we consider how much its author was suffering from impaired health during the period of its composition.

The years 1849–50 were years of sudden changes and convulsions in the political world of the Continent, and a whiff of the general excitement penetrated even to little Three Mile Cross!

Mary Mitford writes to an American friend: "We have here one of the Silvio Pellico exiles —Count Carpinetta—whose story is quite a romance. He is just returned from Turin, where he was received with enthusiasm, might have been returned as Deputy for two places, and did recover some of his property confiscated years ago by the Austrians. It does one's

heart good to see a piece of poetical justice transferred to real life."

As a rule Miss Mitford's judgment, both of books and of character, was singularly sane, but there were some exceptions, her admiration of Louis Napoleon being one of "her most potent crazes," as a warm friend styled it. She believed that his becoming Emperor would work much good for France, but had she lived long enough to become acquainted with his real character and to witness its baleful influence upon the nation we feel sure she would have changed her opinion.

Among the many visitors from all parts to Three Mile Cross who were desirous to see the author of *Our Village* there was a certain Dr. Spencer T. Hall, who had been giving lectures on scientific subjects at Reading. He recorded his pleasant experiences in an article published in a newspaper of the day of which we have a copy before us. After describing Miss Mitford's cottage by the roadside he goes on to say: "A good garden at the back of the house produced some of the finest geraniums and strawberries in the kingdom; and with presents of these to her London or country friends she could gracefully, and to them very agreeably, repay their occasional presents of new books and game, for no woman stood higher in the estima-

tion of some of the ' county families ' than did that cottage peeress, on whom they continued their calls and compliments just as in more showy if not more happy days. In a corner at

OLD HOUSE NEAR SWALLOWFIELD

the end of the garden there was a rustic summer-house, and this was where our little party took tea, to which the hostess, by her quiet, unaffected conversation, added a charm that will be more easily understood than I can otherwise

describe it when I say that it was rich and piquant as her village stories or that pleasant gossip to be found in the volume she afterwards published under the title of *Recollections of a Literary Life*, and with which I trust the whole country for its own sake is now familiar."

The reader may remember mention being made earlier in this work of the wheelwright's picturesque workshop in the village of Three Mile Cross, which stands at the turn of Church Lane near to the village pond.

Writing to a friend in November, 1850, Mary Mitford remarks: "Just now I have been much interested in a painting that has been going on in the corner of our village street—the inside of an old wheelwright's shop—a large barn-like place open to the roof, full of detail, with the light admitted through the half of hatch doors, and spreading upwards. It is a fine subject, and finely treated. The artist is one not yet much known of the name of Pasmore. . . . It is capitally peopled too—with children picking up chips and watching an old man sharpening a saw and peeping in through windows, stretching up to look through them."

For some years past the cottage at Three Mile Cross had been gradually getting into decay, so that at last Miss Mitford was obliged to contemplate a change of abode. "My poor

cottage is falling about my ears," she writes to a friend in April, 1850. "We were compelled to move my little pony from his stable to the chaise house because there were in the stable three large holes big enough for me to escape through. Then came a windy night and blew the roof from the chaise house, and truly the cottage proper, where we two-legged creatures dwell, is in little better condition; the walls seem to be mouldering from the bottom, crumbling as it were like an old cheese, and whether anything can be done with it is doubtful. Besides which as it belongs to Chancery wards there is a further doubt whether the master will do what may be done. . . . Yet I cling to it—to the green lanes—to the commons, the copses, the old trees—every bit of the old country. It is only a person brought up in the midst of woods and fields in one country place who can understand that strong local attachment."

The move, however, was inevitable, but in the meantime a cottage in the neighbourhood had been found that would suit Miss Mitford's requirements, and thither her chief belongings, consisting of a library of some thousands of volumes and of much furniture, was carted and the removal accomplished in the month of September (1851).

"It was grief to go," she writes; "there I had toiled and striven and tasted as deeply of bitter anxiety, of fear and of hope as often falls to the lot of woman. There in the fullness of age I had lost those whose love had made my home sweet and precious. . . . Friends many and kind; strangers, whose mere names were an honour, had come to that bright garden and that garden room. There Mr. Justice Talfourd had brought the delightful gaiety of his brilliant youth, and poor Haydon had talked more vivid pictures than he ever painted. The illustrious of the last century—Mrs. Opie, Miss Porter, Mr. Cary—had mingled there with poets, still in their earliest dawn. It was a heart-tug to leave that garden."

When she was finishing the last series of stories for *Our Village*, Miss Mitford had addressed some lines of farewell to the spot that she loved so dearly, and we would give them here. "Sorry as I am," she writes, "to part from a locality which has become almost identified with myself, this volume must and shall be the last.

"Farewell, then, my beloved village! The long straggling street, gay and bright in this sunny, windy April morning, full of all implements of dirt and noise—men, women, children, cows, horses, waggons, carts, pigs, dogs, geese

and chickens, busy, merry, stirring little world, farewell ! Farewell to the breezy common, with its islands of cottages and cottage gardens, its oaken avenues populous with rooks ; its clear waters fringed with gorse, where lambs are straying ; its cricket ground where children already linger, anticipating their summer revelry ; its pretty boundary of field and woodland and distant farms ; and latest and best of its ornaments, the dear and pleasant mansion where dwell the neighbours of neighbours, the friends of friends ; farewell to ye all ! Ye will easily dispense with me, but what I shall do without you I cannot imagine. Mine own dear village, farewell ! "

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SWALLOWFIELD

THE "flitting" was accomplished in September, 1851. "I was compelled to move from the dear old house," writes Miss Mitford; "not very far; not much further than Cowper when he migrated from Olney to Weston and with quite as happy an effect.

"I walked from the one cottage to the other in an Autumn evening when the vagrant birds whose habit of assembling here for their annual departure gives, I suppose, its name of Swallowfield to the village, were circling and twittering over my head.

"Here I am now in this prettiest village, in the snuggest and cosiest of all snug cabins; a trim cottage garden divided by a hawthorn hedge from a little field guarded by grand old trees; a cheerful glimpse of the high road in front, just to hint that there is such a thing as the peopled world; and on either side the deep, silent, woody lanes that form the distinctive character of English scenery. Very lovely

is my favourite lane, leading along a gentle declivity to the valley of the Loddon, by pastoral water meadows studded with willow pollards, past picturesque farm-houses and quaint old mills, the beautiful river glancing here and there like molten silver."

Again she writes: "I am charmed with my new cottage. . . . It stands under the shadow of superb old trees, oak and elm, upon a scrap of common which catches every breeze and I see the coolest of waters from my window."

We have visited Swallowfield Cottage, have been into its various rooms and have wandered about its pretty garden. No wonder that Miss Mitford felt it to be a sweet and peaceful home to retire to! The front court is now a pretty piece of garden with a small lawn and with borders of flowers on either side of the path which leads to the front door from the garden gate. The house has been enlarged in recent years by the addition of a small wing on the left-hand side, while two shallow bay-windows have also been introduced—but it is still a cottage in appearance.

On the right-hand side there still rises the tall acacia tree with the syringa bush by its side of which Miss Mitford speaks. "So you do not write out of doors," she writes to a literary friend. "I *do*, and am writing at this moment

at a corner of the house under a beautiful acacia tree with as many snowy tassels as leaves. It is waving its world of fragrance over my head mingled with the orange-like odours of a syringa bush. I have a love of sweet smells that amounts to a passion."

The larger garden at the back as well as the small front garden are kept up with reverent care by their present owner ; so that they seem to suggest the presence of their flower-loving mistress.

Wild flowers, too, so dear to her heart, were to be seen just beyond her garden fence. " Have you the white wild hyacinth [in your parts] ? " she asks a friend. " It makes a charming variety amongst its blue sisters and is amongst the purest of white flowers—all so pure. A bank close to my little field is rich in both. Have you fritillaries ? They are beautiful in our water meadows, looking like painted glass."

Miss Mitford's many friends both English and American were soon visiting her in her new home.

" I have often been with her," writes Mr. Fields, " among the wooded lanes of her pretty country, listening to the nightingales, and on such occasions she would discourse so eloquently of the sights and sounds about us that her talk seemed to me ' far above singing.' . . .

THE LAST HOME

She knew all the literature of rural life and her memory was stored with delightful eulogies of forests and meadows. When she repeated or read aloud the poetry she loved, her accents were 'like flowers' voices, if they could speak.'

". . . One day we drove along the valley of the Loddon and she pointed out the Duke of Wellington's seat of Strathfieldsaye. . . . But the mansion most dear to her in that neighbourhood was the residence of her tried friends the Russells of Swallowfield Park. It is indeed a beautiful old place, full of historical and literary associations, for there Lord Clarendon wrote his story of the Great Rebellion. Miss Mitford never ceased to be thankful that her declining years were passing in the society of such neighbours as the Russells. . . . She frequently told me that their affectionate kindness had helped her over the dark places of life more than once, when without their succour she must have dropped by the way."

Among the many friends who hurried to Swallowfield to pay their respects to Miss Mitford was a young writer in whom she was much interested—James Payn. In his *Literary Recollections* he calls her "the dear little old lady, looking like a venerable fairy, with bright sparkling eyes, a clear incisive voice, and a laugh that carried you away with it."

Mary Mitford's mind, in spite of advancing years, was ever open to new ideas and new impressions, so that she gladly hailed the arrival of works just published in America.

She writes to Mr. Fields, who on leaving England had proceeded to Italy, to thank him for sending her an illustrated edition of *Longfellow's Poems* together with a copy of the *Golden Legend:* "I hope I shall be only one among the multitude who think this the greatest and best thing he has done yet, so racy, so full of character, of what the French call local colour, so in its best and highest sense, original. . . . Then those charming volumes of De Quincey and Sprague and Grace Greenwood, and dear Mr. Hawthorne and the two new poets, who if also young poets will be fresh glories for America. How can I thank you enough for all these enjoyments? I have fallen in with Mr. Kingsley, and a most charming person he is . . . you must know Mr. Kingsley. He is very young too, really young, for it is characteristic of our 'young poets' that they generally turn out middle-aged and very often elderly."

And again writing to Mr. Fields she says: "I was delighted with Dr. Holmes's poems for their individuality. How charming a person he must be! And how truly the portrait represents the mind, the lofty brow full of thought,

and the wrinkle of humour in the eye! (Between ourselves I always have a little doubt of genius when there is no humour; certainly in the very highest poetry the two go together—Scott, Shakespeare, Fletcher, Burns.) Another charming thing in Dr. Holmes is that every succeeding poem is better than the last. . . . And I like him all the better for being a physician—the one truly noble profession. There are noble men in all professions, but in medicine only are the great mass, almost the whole, generous, liberal, self-denying, living to advance science and to help mankind.

"I rejoice to hear of another romance by the author of *The Scarlet Letter*. That is a real work of genius."

On receiving *The House of Seven Gables* a little later on, she apologizes to Mr. Fields for a delay in thanking him for his kind gift saying that she delayed doing so until she had read the book twice. "At sixty-five," she remarks, "life gets too short to allow us to read every book once and again; but it is not so with Mr. Hawthorne, the first time one sketches them (to borrow Dr. Holmes's excellent word) and cannot put them down for the vivid interest; the next one lingers over the beauty with a calmer enjoyment. Very beautiful this book is!"

Later on she writes to Mr. Fields of Whittier: "He sent me a charming poem on Burns, full of tenderness and humanity and the indulgence which the wise and good can so well afford, and which only the wisest and best can show to their erring brethren."

She writes early in January, 1852, of her *Recollections of a Literary Life*: "My book is out at last, hurried through the press in a fortnight—a process which half killed me and has left the volumes no doubt full of errata,—and you, I mean your House, have not got it. I am keeping a copy for you personally. People say that they like it. I think you will, because it will remind you of this pretty country and of an old Englishwoman who loves you well."

And later on she writes to Mr. Fields: "Thank you for telling me about the kind American reception of my book. . . . I do assure you that to be heartily greeted by my kinsmen across the Atlantic is very precious to me."

Miss Mitford writes to her friend Mrs. Hoare on the subject of Jane Austen's works: "Your admiration of Jane Austen is so far from being a 'heresy,' that I never met any high literary people in my life who did not prefer her to any female prose writer. . . . For my own part I delight in her." And again writing of truth in

works of fiction she says: "The greatest fictions of the world are the truest. Look at the *Vicar of Wakefield*, look at the *Simple Story*, look at Scott, look at Jane Austen, greater because truer than all." In the same letter she remarks:—

"Yes, I ought to have liked Shelley better. But I have a love of clearness—a perfect hatred of all that is vague and obscure—and I still think with the grand exception of the 'Cenci' and of a few shorter poems, that there was rather the making of a great poet, if he had been spared, than the actual accomplishment of any great work. It was an immense promise."

"If you have command of French books," she writes to another friend, "read Saint Beuve's *Causeries du Lundi*—charming volumes, full of variety and attractive in every way."

During the late autumn of 1852 Miss Mitford was busy writing an Introduction to a complete edition of her *Dramatic Works* which her publishers were preparing to bring out. À propos of this undertaking she writes: "For my own part I am convinced that without pains there will be no really good writing. . . . I am still so difficult to satisfy that I have written a long preface to the *Dramatic Works* three times over, many parts far more than three times."

This Introduction forms very interesting reading, giving as it does an account of her own experiences, together with many shrewd and clever remarks and criticisms. We have quoted several passages in our chapters upon the production of the plays.

The work was dedicated to Mr. Bennock, a warm friend and a patron of Art and Letters, who had first suggested the idea to the author of gathering together all her plays in this way and editing them.

On the 24th December of this same year Miss Mitford had a severe accident from an overturn of her pony-chaise in Swallowfield Park. She was thrown violently down on the hard gravel road and was much bruised and shaken although no bones were actually broken. In spite of her sufferings she indites a letter to her friend Miss Jephson in which she says : " I am writing to you at this moment with my left arm bound tightly to my body and no power of raising either foot from the ground. . . . The muscular power of the lower limbs seem completely gone. . . . So much for the bad ; now for the consolation. Nobody else was hurt, nobody to blame ; the two parts of me that are quite uninjured are my head and my right hand. K. is safe in bed and Sam is really everything in the way of help that a man can be, lifting

me about, and directing a stupid old nurse and a giddy young maid with surprising foresight and sagacity. I need not tell you how kind everybody is ; poor Lady Russell comes every day through mud and rain and wind. . . . Everybody comes to me, everybody writes to me, everybody sends me books.

" Mr. Bentley has done me good by giving me something to think of in writing no less than three pressing applications for a second series of *Recollections*, and, although I am forbidden anything like literary composition, and even most letter writing, yet it is something to plan and consider over. I shall (if it please God to grant me health and strength to accomplish this object) introduce several chapters on French literature, and am at this moment in full chase of all Casimir Delavigne's ballads."

Miss Jephson writes to a mutual friend when sending on this letter to him: "Dear Miss Mitford ! She is like lavender, the sweeter the more it is bruised. How wonderful are her spirits and energy after such an accident ! . . . I am glad she is thinking of a second series of *Recollections*. She cannot be idle ; it would be death to her."

CHAPTER XXXIX

PEACEFUL CLOSING YEARS

THE winter of 1852–3 was unusually cold, and Miss Mitford suffered much from rheumatism supervening upon the effects of her accident. For many months she was entirely confined to her room. She writes to her friend Mr. Fields in March: "Here I am at Easter still a close prisoner from the consequences of the accident that took place before Christmas. . . . But when fine weather—warm, genial, sunny weather—comes I will get down in some way or other, and trust myself to that which never hurts anyone, the honest open air. Spring, and even the approach of spring, has upon me something the effect that England has upon you. It sets me dreaming—I see leafy hedges in my dreams and flowery banks, and then I long to make the vision a reality."

She writes again to Mr. Fields in the month of June: "I am in somewhat better trim, although the getting out of doors and into the pony-chaise, from which Mr. May hoped such

great things, has hardly answered his expectations. . . . I am still unable to stand or walk unless supported by Sam's strong hands. However I am in as good spirits as ever, and just at this moment most comfortably seated under the acacia tree at the corner of my house—the beautiful acacia, literally loaded with snowy chains—the flowering trees this summer—lilacs, laburnums, rhododendrons, azalias—have been one mass of blossoms, and none as graceful as this waving acacia. . . . On one side a syringa . . . a jar of roses on the table before me—fresh-gathered roses, the pride of Sam's heart; and little Fanchon at my feet, too idle to eat the biscuits with which I am trying to tempt her—biscuits from Boston, sent to me by Mrs. Sparks, whose kindness is really indefatigable, and which Fanchon ought to like upon that principle if upon no other, but you know her laziness of old. Well, that is a picture of Swallowfield Cottage at this moment."

Among the many gifts from admiring readers of the *Recollections of a Literary Life* that arrived at Swallowfield were choice plants for the garden. No less than twelve climbing roses for the front of her house appeared from the Hertfordshire nurseries, also two seedlings called in honour of her the "Miss Mitford" and the "Swallowfield."

Mary Mitford writes to Mr. Fields :—

" Never, my dear friend, did I expect to like so well a man who came in your place as I do like Mr. Ticknor. . . . It is delightful to hear him talk of you, and to feel that sort of elder brotherhood which a senior partner must exercise is in such hands. He was very kind to little Harry, and Harry likes him *next* to you. He came here on Saturday with the dear Bennocks, and the Kingsleys met him. Mr. Hawthorne was to have come but could not leave Liverpool so soon, so that is a pleasure to come.

" Mr. Ticknor will tell you that all is arranged for printing with Colburn's successors, Hurst and Blackett, two separate works, the plays and dramatic scenes forming one, the stories to be headed by a long tale, of which I have always had the idea in my head to form almost a novel. God grant me strength to do myself and my publishers justice in that story ! "

The title of the new book was *Atherton and other Stories*. They are as fresh and bright in style as if the author were in perfect health, and yet it was, as she writes to Mr. Fields, " in the midst of the terrible cough, which did not allow me to lie down in bed, and a weakness difficult to describe, that I finished *Atherton*."

In her short Preface Miss Mitford mentions

the adverse circumstances under which the composition had been carried on, and expresses her thankfulness to the merciful Providence for "enabling me still to live by the mind, and not only to enjoy the never-wearying delight of reading the thoughts of others, but even to light up a sick chamber and brighten a wintry sky by recalling the sweet and sunny valley which formed one of the most cherished haunts of my happier years." And then she closes this, her last work, with the words: "And now, gentle reader, health and farewell.

M. R. MITFORD.

SWALLOWFIELD,

March, 1854."

Atherton was dedicated to her valued friend Lady Russell, and was published in three volumes during the month of April. It was also published shortly afterwards in America. She writes to Mr. Fields on May 2nd: "Long before this time you will, I hope, have received the sheets of *Atherton*. It has met with an enthusiastic reception from the English press, and certainly the friends who have written to me on the subject seem to prefer the tale which fills the first volume to anything that I have done. I hope you will like it. I am sure you will not detect in it the gloom of a sick chamber."

And writing to an English friend also in May she says: "Thank you for your kindness in liking *Atherton*. It has been a great comfort to me to find it so indulgently, so very warmly, received. Mr. Mudie told Mr. Hurst that the demand was so great that he was obliged to have four hundred copies in circulation."

In this same letter she says: "I am sitting now at my open window, not high enough to see out, but inhaling the soft summer breezes, with an exquisite jar of roses on the window-sill and a huge sheaf of fresh-gathered meadow-sweet giving its almondy fragrance from outside; looking on blue sky and green waving trees, with a bit of road and some cottages in the distance, and [hearing] K——'s little girl's merry voice calling Fanchon in the court. . . . An avalanche of kindness has come from America, where, as in Paris, my book has been reprinted. Letters to me or for me addressed through my friend Mr. Fields have arrived, I think, from almost every man of note in the States—Hawthorne, Longfellow, Holmes, etc. etc. And one lady, Mrs. Sparkes, wife of Jared Sparks, President of Harvard University, Cambridge, gravely invites me, with man-servant and maid-servant, pony and Fanchon, to go and take up my abode with them for two or three years, an unlimited hospitality which seems to English ears astound-

ing. Cambridge is close to Boston, where most of the literary men of America live, and if I were not such a helpless creature really one would be tempted to go and thank all these warm-hearted people for their extraordinary kindness."

And writing in August she says: "I do not think there is an authoress of name who has not sent me messages full of the kindest interest. It is one of the highest mercies by which this visitation has been softened that I can still give my thoughts and time and love and sympathy, not merely to dear friends, but to books and flowers and the common doings of this workaday world."

A lady friend on one occasion had remonstrated with Mary Mitford for what she considered a misplaced enthusiasm. "Ah, my dear friend!" she responds, "do not lecture me for loving and admiring! It is the last green branch in the old tree, the lingering touch of life and youth."

À propos of a tendency of hers to extoll at times some modern poem that had taken her fancy as being superior to the great poems of old, Mr. Fields quotes a saying of Pascal's that "the heart has reasons that reason does not know." "Miss Mitford," he says, "was a charming exemplification of this wise saying."

During the autumn of 1854 Mary's condition

had been rapidly growing worse, though her letters show that her bright spirit was not broken by her continued sufferings and increased weakness, nor her mind in any way clouded. Her last letter to Mr. Fields was written on December 23rd, 1854, only eighteen days before she died. In it she says: "God bless you, my dear friend! May He send to both of you health and happiness and length of days and so much of this world's goods as is needful to prevent anxiety and insure comfort. I have known many rich people in my time, and the result has convinced me that with great wealth some deep black shadow is as sure to walk as it is to follow the bright sunshine. So I never pray for more than the blessed enough for those whom I love best."

On January 1st, 1855, nine days only before her death, she wrote the following letter to a friend: "It has pleased Providence to preserve to me my calmness of mind and clearness of intellect, and also my powers of reading by day and by night, and which is still more my love of poetry and literature, my cheerfulness and my enjoyment of little things. This very day not only my common pensioners the dear robins, but a saucy troop of sparrows and a little shining bird of passage whose name I forget, have all been pecking at once at their

tray of bread-crumbs outside the window. Poor, pretty things! How much delight there is in these common objects if people would learn to enjoy them; and I really think that the feeling for these simple pleasures is increasing with the increase of education."

The end came on January 10th and was in accordance with her sweet life. As she lay with her hand in that of her dear friend Lady Russell she expired so quietly that the actual moment of her departure was not realized. "The features of her face in death," we are told, "undisturbed by any trace of the cares and trials she had endured, were overspread by an expression of intense repose and peace and charity such as no living face had ever known."

In the introduction to her *Dramatic Works* Miss Mitford remarks that she "hopes the plays will be as mercifully dealt with as if they were published by her executor, and that the hand that wrote them were laid in peaceful rest where the sun glances through the great elms in the beautiful churchyard of Swallowfield." And there she lies in the heart of the country she so dearly loved and amidst the sights and sounds that she most cherished.

We would close this book with the words of a friend and contemporary author who knew Miss Mitford well.

Mary Russell Mitford

" Pleasant is the memory because happy was the life, kindly the nature and genial the heart of Mary Russell Mitford. She had her trials and she bore them well; trusting and ever faithful to the *Nature* she loved; sending forth from her poor cottage at Three Mile Cross—from its leaden casement and narrow door—floods of light and sunshine that have cheered and brightened the uttermost parts of the earth."

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